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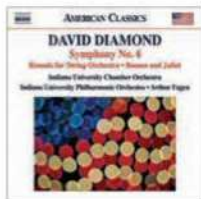
Diamond

Symphony No 6^a. Music for Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet^b. Rounds^b

Indiana University^b Chamber Orchestra and

^aPhilharmonic Orchestra / Arthur Fagen

Naxos American Classics (M) 8 559842 (66' • DDD)



David Diamond composed at least 12 symphonies, though withdrew

an early single-movement essay (1933), replacing it with a different 'No 1' in 1940. Gerard Schwarz and the Seattle Symphony Orchestra recorded Nos 1-4 and 8 for Delos, reissued by Naxos, and the Fifth remains available on New World Records, played by the Juilliard Orchestra under Christopher Keene.

The Sixth (1951-54) here receives its premiere recording from another college orchestra, that of Indiana University who, on the evidence of this 2016 account under Arthur Fagen, sound a well-drilled ensemble. They are put on their mettle in No 6, one of the most closely argued of Diamond's symphonies, with the thematic material derived from the opening *Adagio-Allegro, fortemente mosso* and developed through the central *Adagio*, reaching fruition in the tripartite finale, an introduction, passacaglia and fugue.

The symphony was received poorly at its premiere – given by the Boston Symphony Orchestra under Charles Munch, no less – a poor-quality copy of which can be heard on YouTube, complete with catcalls. It is a hard-edged score in places, without the appeal of its predecessor, No 4 (1945; the Fifth was not completed until 1964!), or Diamond's most popular work, *Rounds* (1944). This string-orchestral triptych – given a marvellous performance at St John's Smith Square, London, in May by Orchestra Nova under George Vass – was composed for Mitropoulos as an avowedly 'happy' and 'uplifting' piece, and fulfils its brief perfectly. *Music for Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet* (1947) was not composed as incidental music but directly as a concert work and

GRAMOPHONE talks to ...

David Shifrin

The acclaimed clarinetist on his rather unusual and very personal album of Nielsen



What first drew you to the music of Nielsen?

I was 13 years old when I first heard Nielsen's Clarinet Concerto. I was so inspired by its energy, colour, emotional breadth and technical challenges that it played a large part in my decision to become a clarinetist.

Why do you play the concerto in an arrangement for chamber ensemble?

I have played the concerto many times, but orchestras are often hesitant to programme it. They don't often engage a clarinet soloist and I am usually called on to perform more traditional repertoire such as Mozart's Concerto. Moreover, the string parts are extremely difficult and orchestras rarely have sufficient rehearsal time to properly prepare it.

Are there advantages to playing the concerto with smaller forces?

The orchestration is quite unique. The sound has a mellow and brooding colour and there is an intricate interaction between the voices

rather like chamber music. The addition of the antagonist snare drum creates a real 'concerto grosso' effect. René Orth has done a masterly job of paring the strings down to a quintet and having one each of horn and bassoon, retaining the orchestral colours while creating the kind of intimate excitement one gets in chamber music. Also, the ability to play the work in this form allows for much more careful preparation.

Can you tell us something of the other Nielsen works on this album?

Nielsen is primarily known as a symphonist of grand, dramatic and often dark gestures. Discovering the lighter, more intimate and humorous miniatures contained in this album has been an enormous pleasure.

catches nicely the atmosphere of key parts of the play. Both receive eloquent, well-prepared interpretations from the Indiana University Chamber Orchestra. Unspectacular but perfectly serviceable sound, too. **Guy Rickards**

Dvořák • Sokolović

'New Worlds'

Dvořák Symphony No 9, 'From the New World', Op 95 B178 Sokolović Golden slumbers kiss your eyes ...^a

^aDavid DQ Lee *countertenor* ^aCantata Singers of Ottawa; ^aCapital Chamber Choir; ^aEwashko Singers; Canada's National Arts Centre Orchestra / Alexander Shelley

Analekta (E) AN2 8873 (71' • DDD)



Themes of migration, border crossing and leaving old worlds behind while

anticipating new worlds up ahead bind the two seemingly disparate works on this disc. Serbian-born, Montreal-based Ana Sokolović's *Golden slumbers kiss your eyes* ... for combined choirs, countertenor soloist and orchestra consists of seven uninterrupted movements set to texts in six languages drawn from folk poetry. The first piece features a vocal line energised by fervent incantation supported by slow,



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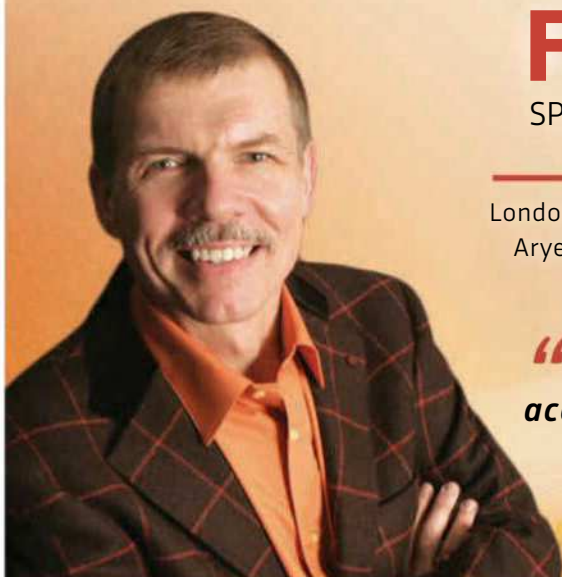
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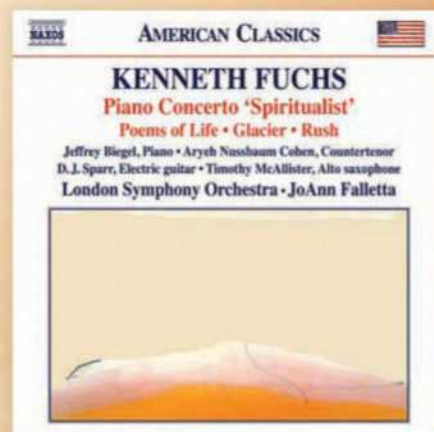
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Steven Kemper mixes electronics with acoustic instruments with intriguing results

steadily repeating F naturals in the bass, sudden melodic stabs and sustained clusters, cumulating in a shattering, slowly building choral climax. The title-movement follows, highlighted by haunting interaction between the singer and a solo violinist, plus floating wordless choral passages against billowy clouds of chords.

For my taste, the use of antiphonal 'speech singing' throughout No 3 seems tacky and clichéd, but not the movement's rhythmic ingenuity. On the other hand, No 4's sultry tarantella features delightful countertenor melismas, in contrast to the following movement's desolate introspection. Overall, Sokolović's astute ear for textural variety and theatrical sense of pacing consistently hold attention. Pride of place goes to countertenor David DQ Lee's effortless agility and easy assimilation of the work's stylistic breadth. The absence of texts and translations, however, truly hurts.

As for Dvořák's *New World* Symphony, the National Arts Centre Orchestra and Alexander Shelley face strong competition, although the first two movements offer much to savour. Note, for example, the stinging unanimity in the *Allegro molto*'s loud *tutti*s, the strong brass chording and the development section's vividly articulated string counterpoint. In the *Largo*, the woodwinds and cello/bass pizzicatos interact with sophisticated delicacy; shall we assume that the

principal oboist Charles Hamann doubles on cor anglais, sweetly intoning the famous solo? Aside from the Trio section's rustic lilt, the third-movement *Molto vivace* is rather underplayed and foursquare; compare it alongside the vivacious momentum and stronger canonic profile in Leonard Bernstein's New York Philharmonic recording (Sony) and you'll hear for yourself. However, the finale gains dynamism and confidence as it unfolds. Even if the final pages don't quite match the trenchant impact of Szell/Cleveland (Sony) or the various Neumann/Czech Philharmonic (Supraphon) versions. Mainly recommended for Ana Sokolović's imaginative and communicative work.

Jed Distler

Kemper

Mythical Spaces^a. Breath^b. Lament^c.

In illo tempore^d. The Seven Stars^e

^aWayla Chambo fl ^aDana Jessen bn

^aDavid Wegehaupt sax ^aMike Truesdell perc

^aAurie Hsu prepared pf ^{abcd}Steven Kemper elec

Ravello © RR7980 (44' • DDD)



Despite its ungenerous playing time, this is an intriguing disc of electroacoustic music.

Steven Kemper (b1981) is Assistant Professor of Music and Technology

at the Mason Gross School at Rutgers University and a former pupil of the late Elliot Schwartz (1936-2016). The works presented include a suite for prepared piano (*The Seven Stars*, 2012), a brief 'fixed media electroacoustic' piece, *Breath* (2015, originally composed as a film accompaniment), and two duos for electronics and acoustic instruments: *Mythical Spaces*, with percussion (2010), and *Lament*, with flute (2015). Most intriguing is *In illo tempore* (2012, rev 2017), a quartet reworking themes from Monteverdi's 1610 Mass, scored for saxophone, bassoon and two musical 'robots', the Automated Monochord Instrument (AMI) and Cylindrical Aerophone Robotic Instrument (CARI). These electronica provide the base for the wind soloists to develop the thematic material in unexpected directions.

The purely electroacoustic piece, *Breath*, is the least compelling, its four uneventful minutes built from recordings of the composer breathing in: 'Exhalations were discarded!' Similarly, the suite of miniatures for prepared piano, *The Seven Stars* – inspired by the segment of the constellation Ursa Major known in the US as the Big Dipper and in Britain as the Plough – is curiously earthbound, a set of studies, one per star, in texture (one sounds like a bee in a biscuit tin) with little musical cohesion.

Where Kemper is at his best is in the three works juxtaposing standard instruments with electronics, whether

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In Schubert's *Octet* and the *Septet* by Swedish hero Franz Berwald, richness of sound mixes with intricate counterpoint.

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Wolf, Mahler & Brahms | Soloist: Thomas Bauer (baritone)

A triptych in crescendo: selected songs with piano by Hugo Wolf, orchestral Lieder by Mahler and Brahms' *Symphony n°1*.



In illo tempore or the title-track, *Mythical Spaces*, the percussion textures coming closest perhaps to those artificially generated. That said, *Lament*, the flute part beautifully played by Wayla Chambo (for whom it was written), steals the show.

Guy Rickards

Nielsen

Clarinet Concerto, Op 57 (arr René Orth)^a.

Six Humorous Bagatelles, Op 11 (arr Stephen Cohen)^b. Fantasy^b. Fantasy Pieces, Op 2 (transcr D Shifrin)^b. *Serenata in vano*^c

David Shifrin *cl*^a Ryan Reynolds *bn*

^aWilliam Purvis *hn*^a Jon Greeney *snare drum*

^aBenjamin Hoffman, ^aTheodore Arm *vn*

^aJennifer Frautschi *va* ^aMihai Marica *vc*

^aCurtis Daily *db* ^bYevgeny Yontov *pf*

Delos © DE3527 (51' • DDD)

^aRecorded live at Chamber Music Northwest, Kaul Auditorium, Reed College, Portland, OR, July 21, 2016



Because Nielsen's Clarinet Concerto is sparsely scored for two

bassoons, two horns, snare drum and string section, the music readily lends itself to chamber downsizing for one instrument per part. If anything, René Orth's skilful adaptation transforms the chamber-like repartee between soloist and ensemble into a fully fledged equal partnership, especially in regard to the nimble first violin part and that pesky doppelgänger of a snare drummer. In passages where Nielsen calls for two bassoons (the return to Tempo I following the first clarinet cadenza, for example), the horn simply fills in, and vice versa.

Equal partnership, of course, means equal responsibility, and each participant in this premiere recording contributes on the highest level. In turn, Nielsen's challenging clarinet-writing poses no problems whatsoever for David Shifrin's seasoned mastery. His prodigious breath control and effortless legato phrasing make light of the composer's more fanciful flights, yet he's not afraid to rough up his tone in climactic *fortissimos* or in his combative exchanges with Jon Greeney's expert snare drum virtuosity. In this sense, Shifrin's interpretation reconciles the suave demeanour of Sabine Meyer, Martin Fröst and Anthony McGill with the more daring and volatile Stanley Drucker and Olie Schill (the latter's BIS recording with Myung-Whun Chung and the Gothenburg Symphony Orchestra is my version of reference).

The remaining works are more than mere fillers. I've never heard so robustly characterised a performance of the delicious *Serenata in vano* for clarinet, bassoon, cello and double bass, not to mention these lovingly nuanced readings of the early *Fantasy* and two *Fantasy Pieces* (beautifully appropriated by Shifrin from the original oboe part). And Steven Cohen's arrangements of the *Six Humorous Bagatelles* transform these simple solo piano teaching pieces into ideal encores. Great sound, great annotations, great programming and great musicianship can only mean one thing: buy this disc! **Jed Distler**

'American Romanticism II'

Bird Gavotte Boekelman In der Einsamkeit (In Solitude) Borowski Suite Rococo. Two Pieces

Cadman To a Vanishing Place Chadwick Intermezzo Foote Theme and Variations Foster My Old Kentucky Home. Old Folks at Home

Gelder The Lingac Boatsong ES Kelly Confluentia L Lombard Élégie Miersch Wiegenlied (Cradle Song) Nevin La guitare (Pierrot et Pierrete)

Gowanus Arts Ensemble / Reuben Blundell

New Focus © FCR166B (86' • DDD)

'American Romanticism III'

Bonvin Festzug (Festival Procession) Branscome

A Memory Burleigh Rocky Mountain Sketches - At Sunset C Busch Minnehaha's Vision. The Song of Chibiabos Cadman Thunderbird Suite

E MacDowell At an Old Trysting Place DS Smith Prince Hal (An Overture), Op 31

Lansdowne Symphony Orchestra / Reuben Blundell

New Focus © FCR166C (69' • DDD)



The Australian-born conductor Reuben Blundell continues to make splendid use of the Edwin A Fleisher Collection of Orchestral Music at the Free Library of Philadelphia, whose holdings include thousands of familiar and neglected works. In 2016 New Focus Recordings released 'American Romanticism' (10/16), the first result of Blundell's exploration comprising little known music by late 19th- and early 20th-century composers born in the US or drawn to their adopted homeland. It is now followed by 'American Romanticism II' (featuring, as on the initial release, the Brooklyn-based Gowanus Arts Ensemble) and 'American Romanticism III' (with

Blundell leading the Lansdowne Symphony Orchestra, a community ensemble in a suburb of Philadelphia).

The word 'American' in these discs' titles must be taken with a dash of salt. Whatever its provenance, most of the music sounds distinctly European, with hints of Dvořák, Brahms, Tchaikovsky and any number of beloved Romantics. But what Blundell and colleagues offer is never less than appealing and accomplished, and certainly worthy of the occasional appearance on chamber and orchestral programmes.

'American Romanticism II' begins with a favourite by the disc's only household name, Stephen Foster: an arrangement of 'Old Folks at Home'. The composers of the remaining pieces are remembered mostly for contributions to American academic and church life. Among them are such significant figures as George Whitefield Chadwick, represented by the charming Intermezzo, and Arthur Foote, whose bucolic Theme and Variations is an affecting and vibrant creation in the mould of Tchaikovsky's Serenade for Strings.

More signs of New World influences – Native American elements and folk tunes – can be heard on 'American Romanticism III', especially in Charles Wakefield Cadman's *Thunderbird Suite* and two richly coloured scores by Carl Busch, *Minnehaha's Vision* and *The Song of Chibiabos*. For swashbuckling allure long before Korngold seized attention in Hollywood, there's David Stanley Smith's *Prince Hal* overture. And anyone wondering how deeply Wagner inspired others should hear Ludwig Bonvin's *Festzug*.

Blundell leads shapely, animated performances with both ensembles. The 10 Gowanus string players bring bountiful finesse to the repertoire, while the Lansdowne Symphony, a group of volunteer musicians, face their assignments with fine commitment. **Donald Rosenberg**

'Music in the Listening Place'

Dickau If music be the food of love Dove The Passing of the Year Gilkyson Requiem Houkum The Rune of Hospitality Ravel Trois Chansons D Read Windham Slayton Three Settings of Ezra Pound Traditional Indodana Whitacre Three Songs of Faith

Vanderbilt Chorale / Tucker Biddlecombe

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Earnest passion: Tucker Biddlecombe and the Vanderbilt Chorale shine in a variety of repertoire

David Dickau's gently intoxicated *If music be the food of love*, the Vanderbilt Chorale launch into each track with the earnest passion that only university music students can innocently and genuinely provide. Led by longtime music director Tucker Biddlecombe, the Chorale shine in a variety of repertoire that suggests the experience of hearing an actual concert, though they were recorded last year over six days in April and September.

The sheer professionalism of the results in the larger sets like Eric Whitacre's *Three Songs of Faith* and Michael Slayton's *Three Settings of Ezra Pound* – where the singers deal so well with the demands of layerings, shadings, colour and intonation – nevertheless comes with a certain sameness at times. They seem more personally involved with Jonathan Dove's substantial *The Passing of the Year*, a moving reflection on life in memory of the composer's mother, 'who died too young'.

It is Ravel's *Trois Chansons* that unexpectedly steal the show. The Chorale get the sophisticated sound of the French just right, singing the words as if they were poetry; in 'Trois beaux oiseaux du paradis' the soprano Lauren Urquhart sings her solo with celestial beauty. And even though they flirt with rough going early on in 'Ronde', the Chorale end up quite deliciously.

The Chorale seem equally at home in smaller pieces by Alf Houkum and Eliza

Gilkysen (an exquisitely brief Requiem), and a traditional song in the IsiXhosa click language. **Laurence Vittes**

'Seven Words from the Cross'

Billings David's Lamentation. Jordan ('There is a land of pure delight'). Plymton ('In deep distress I oft have cried'). When Jesus wept **Bradbury** Just as I am **F Buckley** Break it gently to my mother **H Distler** Ich wollt, dass ich daheime wär **Hildegard of Bingen** Caritas abundat **Mäntyjärvi** Death may dissolve (Fantasia on a Hymn by William Billings) **Poulenc** Vinea mea electa **Sheppard** In manus tuas **Thorvaldsdóttir** Þann heilaga kross **Traditional** Deep River. New Britain ('Amazing Grace'). Were you there?. Wondrous Love

Skylark Vocal Ensemble

Sono Luminus ® (CD + DSL92219 (49' • DDD • DTS-HD MA5.1, 9.1 Auro-3D & 9.1 Dolby Atmos • T/t)



The Boston-based Skylark Vocal Ensemble, who made their UK debut

this year in an innovative Good Friday concert at Tenebrae's Holy Week Festival at St John's Smith Square in London, embrace choral music across 10 centuries in their third Sono Luminus recording. Progressing thematically through the Seven Last Words, Skylark give themselves wholly to each piece in

the effectively sequenced programme with a passionate purity that leaves the impression that any of this wonderfully consoling, transporting music could have been written at any time.

Alternating eloquent spirituals and angular William Billings hymns along with Hildegard, Hugo Distler and Poulenc, the programme reaches its apogee in 10 minutes of music by the contemporary composers Anna Thorvaldsdóttir and Jaakko Mäntyjärvi, one radiant and the other sturdy, before finishing with more traditional fare including an exquisite performance of John Sheppard's *In manus tuas*. Mäntyjärvi's *Death may dissolve*, the bolder and more dynamic of the two, is the first recording of a fantasy on a Billings hymn and as a result has a communal New England feel; Thorvaldsdóttir's powerfully ethereal *Þann heilaga kross* is more personally, painfully heartfelt.

The sheer musical purpose and thrilling skill with which the many solo passages are handled testify to Skylark's depth; their ensemble work is often stunning. The recording, made at the Church of the Redeemer in Chestnut Hill, outside Boston, accommodates the music's long lines and spiritual harmonies with ease. Absorbing booklet notes by Skylark's artistic director Matthew Guard and complete texts are provided. **Laurence Vittes**

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Pictured: Cecilia Bartoli (Decca/© Uli Weber/St Petersburg 2014) who featured on the November 2014 cover of Gramophone. Full annual retail price for print only (13 issues) is \$136.50; print only annual subscription, Digital Edition and reviews Database (\$94); Digital Club (\$130); Gramophone Club (\$168). Postage and packaging is not included for overseas orders. Overseas subscription p&p: Europe \$28.99 Rest of World \$35.75. If you have a subscription enquiry then please email subscriptions@markallengroup.com

The lasting legacy of record labels

What does a record label mean to you? Throughout the history of recording, a label has served two key functions. It's been the public face of the business behind the music: the funders, the artist contracts, the mastering process, pressing plants and distribution networks. Companies like Columbia and HMV would compete musically, commercially and technologically as the industry emerged and such competition was a catalyst for some of the greatest triumphs – whether the development of ever-improved recording techniques such as stereo, or the creation of projects such as the rival *Ring* cycles from Decca and DG. For collectors, however, a label has always been more than a marketing badge. Great labels came to be a guarantor of great artistry and sound. A powerful level of trust would develop which labels rarely took for granted.

Last month I travelled to two labels' anniversary celebrations. In Arles, in the South of France, Harmonia Mundi marked its 60th birthday with a festival which wonderfully emphasised the creative 'family' nature of the label, not least in an intimate concert by Kristian Bezuidenhout, Isabelle Faust and Alexander Melnikov at which I felt like a privileged observer of music-making at its most informal. HM's fine and exploratory catalogue – celebrated in two box-sets reviewed on page 99 – is a perfect example of how, if a listener places their trust in a label, even when artist and repertoire might be unfamiliar, they can be taken on a richly rewarding journey.

A week or so later I was in Berlin, where Deutsche Grammophon doubled HM's threescore years and



marked its 120th – a longevity which takes us back to the real infancy of recording. Few record labels – few cultural brands of any sort – have the iconic status of DG. When I interviewed the label's newest signing, Chinese conductor Long Yu, for *Gramophone's* podcast, he said that 'As musicians we have the dream that we can one day have the chance of working with Deutsche Grammophon', a label which represents 'great artistic achievement'. This from a musician in a country where the popularity of classical recording, indeed of Western classical music, is a relatively recent phenomenon. And he's right. Which artist, even from outside the classical genre, hasn't relished an opportunity to have an album emblazoned with the famous Yellow Label's cartouche?

Labels, then, are an eloquent expression of creativity and quality. But how will this work in streaming, where instead of a label's iconography being expressed through a CD sleeve, an album's visible presence might be at best limited to a small thumbnail on a phone, at worst mere metadata? And with smart speakers, music might have no visible presence at all. Where once a label was both hallmark and calling card, online it might be barely noticed. Who searches by label in a streaming service? Are many online listeners even aware of what label an album is on? And if not, how will a label serve that once precious role of encouraging a listener to take a chance on a release which might unlock a life-long musical passion? I hope solutions will be found, so that labels can play a similarly important role in the life of listeners of the future, as they have for all of us.

martin.cullingford@markallengroup.com

THIS MONTH'S CONTRIBUTORS



'My passion for Bernstein remains the worst kept secret in the world,' jokes **EDWARD SECKERSON**,

who contributes to our anniversary coverage. 'For this centenary year I've performed a cabaret show in his honour, and written a good few thousand words – and I couldn't be happier.'



'It is inevitably bittersweet to spend time reflecting upon a lost and much-missed mentor, inspiration and

hero,' says **MICHAEL MCMANUS**, who writes about the link between Bernstein's political leanings and his musical output. 'It has been a privilege and a profound pleasure to share these personal memories.'



'For me, Bernstein is the whole package,' says **ROB COWAN**, who leads us through two anniversary box-

sets. 'He was a creative lightning strike, an interpretative maverick and a peerless communicator. Writing about him has brought me face to face with many magnificent contradictions.'

THE REVIEWERS Andrew Achenbach • David Allen • Nalen Anthoni • Tim Ashley • Mike Ashman • Michelle Assay • Richard Bratby • Edward Breen • Liam Cagney • Alexandra Coghlan • Rob Cowan (consultant reviewer) • Jeremy Dibble • Peter Dickinson • Jed Distler • Adrian Edwards • Richard Fairman • David Fallows • David Fanning • Andrew Farach-Colton • Iain Fenlon • Neil Fisher • Fabrice Fitch • Jonathan Freeman-Attwood • Charlotte Gardner • David Gutman • Christian Hoskins • Lindsay Kemp • Philip Kennicott • Richard Lawrence • Andrew Mellor • Ivan Moody • Bryce Morrison • Hannah Nepil • Jeremy Nicholas • Christopher Nickol • Geoffrey Norris • Richard Osborne • Stephen Plaistow • Mark Pullinger • Peter Quantrill • Guy Rickards • Malcolm Riley • Marc Rochester • Patrick Rucker • Julie Anne Sadie • Edward Seckerson • Hugo Shirley • Pwyl ap Siôn • Harriet Smith • David Patrick Stearns • David Threasher • David Vickers • John Warrack • Richard Whitehouse • Arnold Whittall • Richard Wigmore • William Yeoman

Gramophone, which has been serving the classical music world since 1923, is first and foremost a monthly review magazine, delivered today in both print and digital formats. It boasts an eminent and knowledgeable panel of experts, which reviews the full range of classical music recordings. Its reviews are completely independent. In addition to reviews, its interviews and features help readers to explore in greater depth the recordings that the magazine covers, as well as offer insight into the work of composers and performers. It is *the* magazine for the classical record collector, as well as for the enthusiast starting a voyage of discovery.

CONTENTS

Volume 96 Number 1164

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Reviews

EDITOR'S CHOICE 7

The 12 most highly recommended recordings reviewed in this issue

RECORDING OF THE MONTH 32

Bizet's opera *The Pearl Fishers* is awarded the top recommendation, thanks to a superb cast directed by Alexandre Bloch and his Lille forces

ORCHESTRAL 34

Absorbing Adams from Scotland; a double dose of Gergiev's Bruckner; Caroline Goulding plays Mozart and Korngold

CHAMBER 52

Yuri Bashmet's Brahms; the Mori Trio play Dvořák; Ilya Gringolts with more Stravinsky

INSTRUMENTAL 62

Francesco Piemontesi impresses in Liszt; Alexandra Dariescu's unique *Nutcracker*

VOCAL 74

Bach's bass cantatas; Łukaszewski from Tenebrae; Carolyn Sampson's Schubertiade; De Profundis sing sacred music by Sebastián de Vivanco

OPERA 86

Bernstein's *A Quiet Place*; Philippe Jaroussky sings Gluck; Verdi's *Otello* with Kaufmann & Co

JAZZ & WORLD MUSIC 97

Reviews from our sister titles *Jazzwise* and *Songlines*

REISSUES 98

Anniversary boxes from the vaults of Harmonia Mundi; a boxed-up selection of Massenet operas

BOX-SET ROUND-UP 101

REPLAY 102

Leonard Rose; Alexander Borovsky; Emil Gilels

CLASSICS RECONSIDERED 104

Two critics have different takes on Sir Thomas Beecham's 1959 EMI recording of Bizet's *Carmen*

BOOKS 106

An anniversary round-up of books on Bernstein: an updated classic and two new titles

GRAMOPHONE COLLECTION 108

David Gutman surveys the recording history of Bernstein's Plato-inspired *Serenade*

REVIEWS INDEX 128



Features

FOR THE RECORD 8

The latest classical music news, and the next instalment of our new features: this month we tell the story of the Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra, and in our focus on musical genres, we explore the origins of the Divertimento

THE BERNSTEIN CENTENARY

MAN OF THE THEATRE 16

Edward Seckerson paints a vivid picture of this genre-hopping composer who believed that music could tell any story, any which way it liked

AMBASSADOR FOR PEACE 22

Michael McManus explores Bernstein's bold political outlook and how this made itself known in major works such as *Songfest* and *Mass*

PIONEER OF RECORDINGS 26

Rob Cowan takes as his starting point two anniversary box-sets from DG and Sony to celebrate Bernstein's massive recorded legacy

THE MUSICIAN & THE SCORE 50

Gramophone's Reviews Editor Tim Parry meets with pianist Steven Osborne to discuss the hidden complexity of Rachmaninov's *Études-tableaux*

ICONS 60

Richard Fairman recalls his first, unforgettable encounter with the lyric soprano Julia Varady

CONTEMPORARY COMPOSERS 72

Jed Distler on the music of his mentor, colleague and friend, the composer-pianist Frederic Rzewski

WHAT NEXT? 84

A musical journey inspired by Strauss's *Don Juan*

PERFORMANCES AND EVENTS 114

HIGH FIDELITY 117

NOTES, LETTERS & OBITS 124

NEW RELEASES 126

MY MUSIC 130

Playwright Barney Norris on a life full of music

» LIFE IS HAPPINESS INDEED «

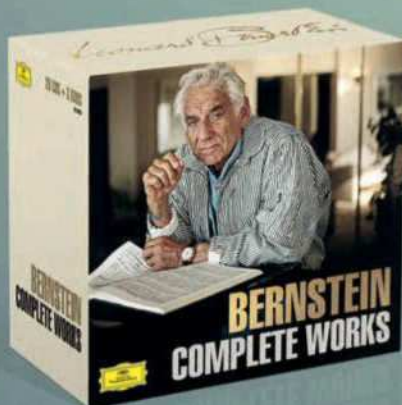
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GRAMOPHONE *Editor's choice*

Martin Cullingford's pick of the finest recordings from this month's reviews



RECORDING OF THE MONTH



BIZET

Les pêcheurs de perles
Sols; Lille National Orchestra / Alexandre Bloch
Pentatone
► **MARK PULLINGER'S REVIEW IS ON PAGE 32**

For all the fame of its renowned duet, Bizet's *The Pearl Fishers* hasn't been so well represented on record. This changes that, with a superb cast and brilliantly spirited playing throughout.



GÓRECKI

Symphony No 3
Poznań Philharmonic Orchestra / Andrzej Boreyko
Dux

Made just two years after the famous Zinman recording but only now available, this is, writes a deeply moved Ivan Moody, 'a masterly performance of a masterpiece'.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 39**



VIVALDI

String Concertos.
Viola d'amore Concertos
Accademia Bizantina / Ottavio Dantone
Naïve

To see Naïve's excellent Vivaldi Edition powering ahead once more is cause for celebration, and this disc is another hugely enjoyable addition.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 47**



PROKOFIEV

Violin Sonatas
Alexandra Conunova *vn*
Michail Lifits *pf*
Aparté

From the bleak opening onwards, Alexandra Conunova and Michail Lifits convey complete immersion in this music's range of force, colour and beauty.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 58**

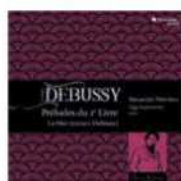


BYRD

'One Byrde in Hand'
Richard Egarr *hpd*
Linn
'An outstanding celebration of Byrd

as one of the first keyboard greats' from a harpsichord player who holds the greatest love and respect for the composer's music in all its forms.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 62**



DEBUSSY

Préludes, Book 2. La mer
Alexander Melnikov *pf*
Harmonia Mundi
Once again, a superb release from Alexander

Melnikov which encourages us to listen to the music afresh, in part thanks to his choice of instrument, but mostly due to his remarkable artistry.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 63**

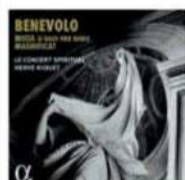


SUK Piano Works

Jonathan Plowright *pf*
Hyperion
Jonathan Plowright once again reminds us what a brilliant pianist

he is, communicating at every stage of this recital of early works by Suk his evident affection for this music. Another fine addition to Hyperion's piano catalogue.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 66**

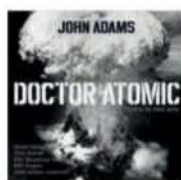


BENEVOLO

Missa Si Deus pro nobis
Le Concert Spirituel / Hervé Niquet
Alpha

The sheer scale of this richly textured 17th-century music, captured in a perfectly spacious acoustic, is compelling from the very beginning. A fascinating project.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 74**



ADAMS Doctor Atomic

Sols; BBC Symphony Orchestra / John Adams
Nonesuch
John Adams's score, propulsive and

mysterious at turns, powerfully leads us through yet another striking opera exploring the moral dilemmas thrown up by modernity, all brilliantly performed.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 86**



HANDEL 'Finest Arias

for Base Voice, Vol 2'
Christopher Purves *bar*
Arcangelo / Jonathan Cohen
Hyperion

Five years on since Vol 1, another well-deserved Editor's Choice for a singer whose versatile and characterful voice is perfectly matched to this Handelian feast.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 91**



DVD/BLU-RAY

MOZART Lucio Silla

Sols; Teatro Real, Madrid / Ivor Bolton
BelAir Classiques

It's primarily for the fascinating staging by director Claus Guth that Hugo Shirley recommends that all interested in Mozart's early operas should seek out this release.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 92**



REISSUE/ARCHIVE

BEETHOVEN

Complete String Quartets
Budapest Quartet
Sony Classical

'Among the best complete cycles of Beethoven quartets from the period', writes Rob Cowan.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 102**



Listen to many of the Editor's Choice recordings online at **qobuz.com**

FOR THE RECORD

Sony signs contracts with Kurzak and Kavakos

Sony Classical has signed the Polish soprano Aleksandra Kurzak to its roster. Formerly with Decca – for which she made a couple of well-received solo albums – Kurzak will release her first recording under the new contract this autumn; she will be joined in this project by her husband Roberto Alagna. A solo album will follow in the spring of 2019.

Kurzak, who holds a PhD in music, started her career performing lighter soprano parts such as Susanna (*Le nozze di Figaro*), Gilda (*Rigoletto*), Adina (*L'elisir d'amore*) and the title-role in *Lucia di Lammermoor*, but she has recently taken on slightly heavier roles such as Rachel in Halévy's *La Juive* and Nedda in *Pagliacci*. Future plans include Verdi's Luisa Miller and Elisabetta (*Don Carlo*). A former member of Hamburg State Opera, Kurzak sings regularly in the world's great houses.

Reviewing her Rossini collection for Decca in June 2013, Richard Wigmore spoke of her as 'a natural comedienne' who



Soprano Aleksandra Kurzak joins Sony Classical

'combines a vivacious stage presence with graceful, finished phrasing and an apparently effortless coloratura technique ... She is especially good at generating a crescendo of delirious, dizzying glee that is such a hallmark of Rossini's comic art.'

In another move across from Decca, violinist Leonidas Kavakos has also signed with Sony Classical, marking a return to the label following previous recordings of Mendelssohn and Mozart. The first fruits of their new partnership will be a recording of Beethoven's Violin Concerto with the Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra, followed by the complete Bach Solo Sonatas and Partitas. The Greek musician was named *Gramophone* Artist of the Year 2014 following a public vote, and his passion for recording is well captured in the reflections he made at the time of the announcement: 'In a world full of visual and acoustical "noise", recordings provide a personal moment of communion with the essence of music and therefore a way to rediscover oneself.'

DG marks its 120th by signing Chinese conductor Long Yu

Deutsche Grammophon has celebrated its 120th anniversary by further strengthening its place in the Chinese musical scene with the signing of Chinese conductor Long Yu and the Shanghai Symphony Orchestra.

The move builds on DG's existing relationships with some of today's leading young Chinese soloists – not least the pianists Lang Lang, Yundi Li and Yuja Wang – and will no doubt, as DG President Clemens Trautmann put it, 'foster the already significant profile of DG in China' (Trautmann is pictured above with Long Yu, right, and Shanghai SO President Fedina Zhou).

The first album by this partnership, due for release next year to mark the orchestra's 140th anniversary, will feature both Chinese and Russian repertoire – indeed, both parties have made it clear that their ambition for the collaboration is to draw on Western as well as Chinese composers. 'Shanghai's profile as an international city, open to the world and cultural exchange, makes it the ideal place to explore fresh ideas and look at ways of bringing together the best of Chinese and Western culture,' said Long Yu. As part of the deal, DG will also release previous recordings from the SSO's catalogue. Long Yu has served as SSO's Music Director for a decade. A decade before that he had founded the Beijing Music Festival, though this month he announced that he is handing the artistic directorship of it to Shuang Zou, currently the assistant programming director.



Warner Classics pairs up with the Leeds Piano Competition

Warner Classics has announced a new partnership with the prestigious Leeds International Piano Competition, whose past winners include Radu Lupu, Murray Perahia and Alessio Bax.

The label will issue a recording, on CD and digitally, shortly after the September finals, featuring the competition winner (or a finalist of the label's choice) playing a concerto with the Hallé under Edward Gardner, alongside recital repertoire from earlier rounds. The competition has long been a high-profile platform for young artists, and the exposure of a swiftly released major-label recording will further enhance that. The winner will join Warner's already strong catalogue of pianists that includes Beatrice Rana, David Fray and Bertrand Chamayou.

The competition prize also offers management by Askonas Holt, engagements with leading international promoters, festivals and orchestras (including Wigmore Hall, the Southbank Centre and the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra), mentoring by Leeds co-artistic director and fellow pianist Paul Lewis, and a cash award.

Adam Gatehouse, who shares the role of artistic director with Paul Lewis (both are pictured above), said the deal is 'part of our re-envisioning of what the competition can bring to both audiences and competitors ... Warner Classics, who have such a strong history in truly nurturing young artists, are the ideal partner in this and we couldn't be more thrilled to be working with them'.



Vasily Petrenko named new RPO head

The Royal Philharmonic Orchestra has named Vasily Petrenko as its new Music Director, starting with the 2021-22 season – which, incidentally, will be the orchestra's 75th anniversary. The Russian conductor has also announced that he'll step down as Chief Conductor of the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra in July 2021, bringing to a close a highly successful 15-year partnership. Petrenko has received numerous accolades from *Gramophone*, and was named Artist of the Year at the 2017 Awards (the result of a public vote) having been named Young Artist of the Year exactly a decade earlier.

Petrenko is also Chief Conductor of the Oslo Philharmonic Orchestra, a post he steps down from in 2020, at which point the RPO will officially bestow him with the title of Music Director Designate. He succeeds Charles Dutoit, who resigned as Artistic Director and Principal Conductor in January this year. Petrenko made his RPO debut in 2016, conducting Mahler's *Resurrection* Symphony, and he returned to conduct Verdi's *Requiem* last year. 'I am delighted to become Music



From Liverpool to London: conductor Vasily Petrenko

Director at this stage in the RPO's history,' said Petrenko. 'The RPO has a very modern approach and a youthful energy which underpin its music-making. We want to attract new and, especially, young audiences, embrace digital technologies and structure exciting seasons in London which can then be toured nationally and internationally.'

James Williams, the RPO's Managing Director, says: 'His title of Music Director is significant. It recognises the artistic leadership that Vasily will bring to the Orchestra, both on and off the podium.'

ONE TO WATCH

Alexandra Conunova Violin

'This recording', writes Andrew Farach-Colton in his review of Alexandra Conunova's debut disc of Prokofiev violin sonatas on Aparté, 'reveals her as a major artist'. So much so, in fact, that it's one of this issue's Editor's Choice recordings. The review (see page 58) tells of detail after detail, section after section, in which she and her pianist Michail Lifits inspire and excel. After lamenting that there is 'insufficient space to share my appreciation', Farach-Colton concludes: 'I can't recommend their freshly considered, vividly recorded interpretations highly enough.'

So, who is this young violinist? This may be her first recording, but keen readers might recognise her name from our pages, perhaps from when she won the Joseph Joachim Violin Competition in Hanover in 2012, or when she was announced as a recipient of a Borletti-Buitoni Trust Fellowship in 2016. Other accolades have included being awarded the Julius Bär Prize for the most accomplished artist of the Verbier Festival Academy in 2013, and in 2015 taking Third Prize at the XV International Tchaikovsky Competition. Born in 1988 in Moldova,



Alexandra Conunova has performed with many leading orchestras, while chamber music-making with stylish partners is also a key element of her work, as demonstrated on this new release.

And, in the way it showcases her as a player of refinement, colour and thoughtfulness, it will surely be this debut disc that places her on the recording map. We look forward to seeing where her career takes her next.

GRAMOPHONE Online

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Podcasts

Conductor Benjamin Zander opens up about his new recording of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony, guitar sensation Miloš Karadaglić looks ahead to his Proms concert this August where he premieres a new concerto written for him by Joby Talbot, and Editor Martin Cullingford and Editor-in-Chief James Jolly discuss in detail some of the topics raised in this new issue of *Gramophone*.

Competition

On August 25, 100 years ago, the great Leonard Bernstein was born. We celebrate his legacy across three comprehensive features this issue (see page 16). In addition, we're offering one lucky reader the chance to win Sony Classical's 100-CD anniversary box-set: 'Leonard Bernstein: The Remastered Edition'.



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ARTISTS & *their* INSTRUMENTS

Miloš Karadaglić on the unique qualities of his Greg Smallman guitar



guitar. But at the same time, because you are playing a guitar that sustains so much and has such rich tonal colour and harmonics, you have to be very skilled at manipulating those sounds in order to create the right sonority. In a way, I feel that if I had got a Smallman in the earlier stages of my development it wouldn't have been good. I 'baked' my craft, if you like, on a very traditional Spanish guitar, and the feeling of that instrument was much lighter, and required much more work to create the sounds that I wanted - it was the perfect vehicle for learning to do that. Then I reached the point where I thought, 'I'm ready, and now I'm going to have my own voice'. When I got the guitar, I really felt as if suddenly I could fly and everything was there.

One of the most exciting things about the Smallman is that the soundboard is extremely thin - it's almost paper-thin, and it's reinforced by carbon fibre. Also, the back of the guitar is very, very thick - it's almost like the back of a drum. So, because the soundboard is so thin, it resonates much further than traditional guitars, and it bounces off a very thick wooden back which is made in many layers, so it has this percussive effect which pushes the sound from the sound hole directly into the audience. And when you play the Smallman, because of this rounded padded wooden back and the sheer weight of the instrument, you really feel the vibrations through your whole body, through the stomach, and this just gives you the feeling that the instrument is part of you.

I would never ever want to play any other instrument now - it just suits my personality down to the core.”
Miloš Karadaglić performs a new concerto by Joby Talbot at the Proms on August 2; his new book 'Play Guitar with Miloš' is available now from Schott

“One of the ways I described my guitar when I got it is that it felt as if, from driving a really good car, I suddenly had a Ferrari! This instrument has so much power, volume and colour - there is an almost limitless resource as to what you can do creatively with the sound. At the same time, a Smallman guitar is a beast that needs to be tamed and, compared to other guitars, they are almost like playing a

different instrument. That's why they are a bit controversial - they don't fit every player, and they don't match everyone's aesthetic idea of what the classical guitar should be like.

But the thing that drew me so much to the Smallman sound was exactly those qualities, because it feels like you can almost press a pedal and sustain the note for a much longer period of time than on a traditional Spanish

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GRAMOPHONE GUIDE TO *Divertimento*

David Thresher charts the evolution of the form, from light entertainment to irony

A divertimento should do exactly that – divert and entertain. It is a description that applies less to the form of the work than to its content: nothing too demanding. Chiefly a term used in the later 18th century, it could describe a single-movement work or one that compiled a string of



Music as entertainment: the 18th-century divertimento

gentle dances into an extended suite. It could be for a soloist, a duo, a chamber group or a small orchestra. It's a curiously general term, excusing a multitude of sins, as opposed to the evening-time entertainment of the serenade or the street-based activities of the cassation.

There are examples by the likes of Boccherini, Leopold Mozart and Stamitz, which fall gently on the ear without challenging the mind. Haydn applied the word to keyboard pieces and early string quartets; Mozart used the term in a number of contexts, including the three 'Salzburg Symphonies', K136-138, bustling three-movement works for string orchestra, and the pair of works for the name day of the Countess Lodron, K247 and 287, with two horns added to the strings. *A Musical Joke* is also designated a divertimento, Mozart gently poking fun at the quality of some amateur performances of this sort of music.

Of course, it was Mozart himself who went and upset the appellation. The Divertimento in E flat for string trio, K563, of 1788, the same year as his final three symphonies, lasting around three quarters of an hour and falling into six movements, is anything but light. It is weighted towards the opening movements, a large-scale sonata allegro and a sumptuous *Adagio* in A flat. The *Andante*, placed between a pair of minuets, embraces dark tonalities and tortured chromaticism. It is Mozart's only complete work for string trio and profoundly influenced Beethoven and Schubert.

The divertimento lay low throughout the oh-so-serious 19th century. Its comeback in the 20th was perhaps more ironic than a bid to reclaim the spirit of light-hearted Enlightenment entertainment. Stravinsky's Divertimento is a sequence of orchestral extracts from his ballet *The Fairy's Kiss*, most often heard now in the composer's violin-and-piano transcription. Bartók's Divertimento was composed as Europe teetered on the brink of war. Tippett's *Divertimento on Sellinger's Round* grew from a composite work written for the Queen's Coronation in 1953. And Bernstein's Divertimento is a sequence of dances for large orchestra, composed for the Boston Symphony with tongue firmly in cheek. 🎧

► Listen to our Divertimento playlist on Qobuz

OPUS ARTE

NEW RELEASES



IL TROVATORE VERDI Royal Opera House

German director David Bösch, celebrated for his theatrical productions for Munich and Frankfurt among others, makes his UK debut with this new production for The Royal Opera. The opera's themes of jealousy, revenge and love play out against a hauntingly beautiful, wintry landscape that has been riven by war.

DVD | BLU-RAY



HAMLET DEAN Glyndebourne

Brett Dean's colourful, energetic, witty and richly lyrical music expertly captures the modernity of Shakespeare's timeless tale, while also exploiting the traditional operatic elements of arias, ensembles and choruses. The artists include Allan Clayton, Sarah Connolly and Barbara Hannigan, conducted by Vladimir Jurowski

DVD | BLU-RAY



THE DA PONTE OPERAS MOZART Royal Opera House

Così fan tutte stars a cast of young rising stars, Kasper Holten's production of *Don Giovanni* stars Mariusz Kwiecien, Erwin Schrott, Miah Persson and Gerald Finley, while David McVicar's production of *Le nozze di Figaro* is one of the world's most beloved operas.

3 DVD SET | 3 BLU-RAY SET



FREDERICK ASHTON THE DREAM SYMPHONIC VARIATIONS MARGUERITE AND ARMAND Royal Opera House

Three contrasting ballets by The Royal Ballet's Founder Choreographer Frederick Ashton. Includes *Marguerite and Armand*, danced by former Royal Ballet Principal Zenaïda Yanowsky and guest artist Roberto Bolle. Conducted by Emmanuel Plasson

DVD | BLU-RAY

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IN THE STUDIO

● Cellist **Matthew Barley** was in **Riga, Latvia**, earlier this month recording his second album for **Signum Classics**. Together with the **Riga Sinfonietta**, Barley recorded **Tavener's The Protecting Veil** on July 2-3 following a concert performance on June 30. With a release date planned for late spring/early summer next year, the recording will mark 30 years since the premiere of the work at the 1989 BBC Proms.

● Pianist **Charles Owen** has returned to his old stomping ground, the **Yehudi Menuhin School** in Cobham, Surrey, to record a double disc of **Brahms's late piano works for Avie**. Owen recorded Opp 76, 79, 116, 117, 118 and 19 last month for a recording due for release in time for the London Piano Festival at Kings Place in October. Owen is one of the festival's co-Artistic Directors alongside duo partner Katya Apekisheva.

● The **Dunedin Consort** under **John Butt** have just completed sessions for **Handel's Samson**. One of Handel's most successful and popular oratorios, *Samson* tells of the last days of the great Israelite warrior and his transcendence from darkness to light. The Dunedins have opted for the first performing version of the work dating from 1743; the CD release, on **Linn Records**, will follow next autumn.

● Also in May, two **Chandos** recording sessions took place in Iceland and Poole respectively. At the **Harpa Concert Hall**, **Yan Pascal Tortelier** conducted the **Iceland Symphony Orchestra** in **Gounod's Symphonies Nos 1 and 2**, while at **The Lighthouse**, **Kirill Karabits** conducted the **Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra** in two works by the Ukrainian composer **Boris Lyatoshinsky**: *Symphony No 3* and his *Symphonic Ballad, Grazhyna*. Karabits is passionate about championing the composer who died 50 years ago this year and who taught Karabits's father, Ivan, at the Kiev Conservatory.

● From July 24 to 26, **Paul McCreesh** and his **Gabrieli forces** are bringing five centuries of choral music to Ely Cathedral in a project called **'An English Coronation: 1902-1953'**. Performing music used for the four coronations of the 20th century, alongside a new commission by David Matthews, the Gabrielis will be joined by an orchestra of rare early 20th-century instruments and several hundred singers from their choral training programme *Gabrieli Roar*. The release, on *Winged Lion/Signum*, is planned for May 2019. Meanwhile, on July 23 at 7.30pm, highlights of the music will be performed, again at Ely Cathedral and with the same spectacular forces, in a concert open to the public.

STUDIO FOCUS *Semyon Bychkov*

The Russian conductor is in the middle of recording The Tchaikovsky Project with the Czech Philharmonic for Decca



There have already been two releases, and next August a box-set of the complete recordings is out ...

The project was suggested to me long before I had any thought of

a future with the Czech Philharmonic, and it took me 15 seconds to say yes. I immediately thought of the Slavic nature of the orchestra – culturally, temperamentally – but at the same time, because of their geographical position and history, they're deeply rooted in the Western world. I thought this combination would be fascinating – and I was right.

Why Tchaikovsky?

The popular image of Tchaikovsky is someone who writes beautiful melodies but who isn't very sophisticated; someone who can be hysterical and whose orchestral sound can be coarse. I never shared this view. Yes, he had a capacity for writing extraordinary melodic material, but when you study the scores you appreciate the music's complexity.

As a conductor, how do you approach him?

It's similar to conducting Brahms. How do you combine what is essentially an extremely

romantic expression with a very classical way of expressing it? One has to find the harmony between the two idioms of romanticism and classicism. If it's purely romantic, the music can acquire that hysterical image which tends to make people cringe. If it's purely classical, it lacks soul. So it's a huge challenge.

Have the Czech players taken to this music?

When we recorded *Manfred*, the orchestra didn't know it and those who *had* played it hadn't had a good experience with it. So you have to convince your colleagues that you're dealing with a masterpiece. I'd say it took six months for them to come to terms with it, but when they did they played it as if possessed.

Was the Fifth, taped in December, easier?

Well, you don't have to convince anyone that it's a great piece! But you still have this most romantic spirit that needs to be expressed through classical means. Also, with the Fifth, there is an enormous discography already so one has to justify doing it again. Having said that, we had already played it three times in concert so I knew what worked. Also, the excitement of the live performances was enormous, and that inspired us to try and recreate that atmosphere in the studio.

You've since recorded the Fourth, and next year you'll record the remaining

symphonies and piano concertos (you've had Symphony No 3 and Piano Concerto No 1 in the can for a while now). You must really feel like you're in your stride!

You have to trust your producer – he's your second pair of ears. I've worked a lot with Holger Urbach, and he knows what I want to hear. But I need the players to know that each recording is as much theirs as it is mine. Whatever part you're playing, *tutti* or solo, your contribution is important – the process is like chamber music. And, for that reason, from day one I've told my colleagues in Prague that they can always come back and listen to the take that's just been recorded. And if they don't like what they hear, they must feel able to express that.

Your new position as Chief Conductor and Music Director of the Czech Philharmonic starts in the 2018-19 season ...

A journalist said to me, 'You always said you wouldn't take on another orchestra. Why now?' And my answer was: 'I fell in love.' I was there with them after Jiří passed away last year – I was there during the Farewell in June, and it was one of those deeply touching moments. I lived with these players and that told me many things about who these people are. People who can say goodbye like that are people who can say welcome to someone new in an equally touching way.

SIR ANTONIO PAPPANO ON WARNER CLASSICS



Featuring: Beatrice Rana, Marie-Nicole Lemieux,
Nadine Sierra and Dame Josephine Barstow

Marking Leonard Bernstein's centenary, Sir Antonio Pappano conducts the American composer's three symphonies and Prelude, Fugue and Riffs. The Orchestra dell'Accademia Nazionale di Santa Cecilia had a long association with Bernstein, who first conducted the orchestra in 1948

*"I find these symphonies revelatory
in the true sense of the word ...
hugely emotive and personal"*

Sir Antonio Pappano

NEW RELEASE: 10 AUGUST 2018
AVAILABLE TO PRE-ORDER

Marking the 100th anniversary of the end of World War I, Ian Bostridge and Antonio Pappano have assembled Requiem, a programme of songs offering historical and poetic perspectives on this momentous event. Composed over a period of some 50 years, the songs are by Gustav Mahler, Kurt Weill and two creative musicians of promise and achievement whose lives were cut short by the Great War, the Englishman George Butterworth (1885-1916) and the German Rudi Stephan (1887-1915).

NEW RELEASE: 26 OCTOBER 2018
AVAILABLE TO PRE-ORDER



ORCHESTRA *Insight...*

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Niels Gade (1844-48), Carl Reinecke (1860-95), Artur Nikisch (1895-1922),

Wilhelm Furtwängler (1922-28), Bruno Walter (1929-33), Kurt Masur

(1970-96), Herbert Blomstedt (1998-2005), Riccardo Chailly (2005-16)

Many orchestras are the living embodiment of a tradition. The Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra goes a few steps further. It is an embodiment of social, political and educational practices and provides one of the most fascinating examples of an evolving sound tradition any music historian could hope to hear. It is the only orchestra in the world whose musicians play weekly in a concert hall, an opera house and a church.

But its home since 1781 has always been the Gewandhaus ('Garment House'), albeit in three incarnations, the first of which gave birth to the nominal tradition itself. Had a series of musical meetings that convened in one part of a three-winged building taken place in its weaponry rather than its textile hall, we might now be discussing the Leipzig Arsenal Orchestra.

Pride in an institution incubated by middle-class enthusiasts kept the name in place and ensured that Mozart, Grieg, Berlioz, Tchaikovsky, Wagner and Strauss all worked with the orchestra it spawned while the likes of Nikisch, Furtwängler and Walter sculpted it. Mendelssohn used the conservatory he founded as a feeder, an arrangement that still underpins the orchestra's thoroughbred identity. In Mendelssohn's day, concertmaster Ferdinand David would be on a podium adjacent to the conductor, the violins and violas on their feet behind him. Strong, unified string playing became part of the orchestra's sonic signature.

The orchestra introduced countless masterpieces of early Romanticism to the world. But a tendency to worship ashes



rather than tend the flame set in during the GDR days. Kurt Masur forced the opening of the third Gewandhaus in 1981, a beautiful essay in socialist modernism, and worked hard to restore the orchestra's reputation after the fall of communism.

Herbert Blomstedt, Gewandhauskapellmeister from 1998 to 2005 (and its guardian from 2016 to 2018), recently told *Gramophone* that the orchestra has 'never been better'. Good timing, as the Gewandhaus has emerged as a recording force only in recent decades. Despite new aspirations, the hallmarks remain: unanimous strings; clean, open winds; brass imbued with the soft fizz of the Eastern bloc; and an overall density of sound that Blomstedt's successor Riccardo Chailly described as an 'incredible wave'.

Chailly's 2013 Brahms recordings reveal how good the orchestra became under his watch; his Gershwin underlines its versatility and his Bach its ancestry. Blomstedt's recent Bruckner cycle offers a direct line to the ensemble's gravitational weight and cultural roots. A new cycle of the same works from current boss Andris Nelsons will doubtless show more besides. **Andrew Mellor**

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A happy partnership: Gražinytė-Tyla and the CBSO

Gražinytė-Tyla will stay on at CBSO

It's clearly been a successful partnership: the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra has extended its contract with Music Director Mirga Gražinytė-Tyla, which began in September 2016, for a further two years until 2021 - which will see her at the helm during the orchestra's centenary year in 2020.

RLPO awards Manze a conducting post

Andrew Manze's rapport with the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra is proving a rich one, the most recent release in their ongoing Vaughan Williams symphony cycle on Onyx - Nos 5 and 6 - being hailed by

reviewer Jeremy Dibble in these pages as 'exceptionally rewarding'. It's fitting, therefore, that the orchestra has just named him its Principal Guest Conductor, initially for three years, commencing in September.

New home for the BBC Symphony

The BBC is to build a brand-new music centre - which will serve as a new home for the BBC Symphony Orchestra and Chorus - in Stratford, East London, the location of London's 2012 Olympics. It will join other cultural organisations, including Sadler's Wells, the V&A and the London College of Fashion, building a presence on the new development, while other BBC music stations will also give regular broadcasts from the facility.

FROM WHERE I SIT

Few conductors could live in the moment as Leonard Bernstein did, enthuses Edward Seckerson




They say we can't get enough of our heroes – but I am seriously wondering if, at this time, when next someone mentions the name Bernstein, my response might be: 'Who?' I jest, of course. I can't think of a musical figure who has proved more important to me personally.

The great man looms larger than life in this issue including my own observations on his compositions and their increasing presence amidst the core repertoire – but reading my colleague Rob Cowan's wonderfully comprehensive assessment of Bernstein's conducting and recording career I was particularly struck by the parallels he drew with the great Furtwängler.

Both were, of course, highly subjective interpreters, both approached other composer's music as they might their own. Bernstein often said that he adopted 'composerly' instincts on the podium, that he could gauge the success or otherwise of a performance by the extent to which he felt he was composing the piece himself as he went along. Indeed, there were times when watching him shape a phrase or highlight an orchestral effect where one might almost imagine a thought-bubble emerging with the words 'Gosh, wish I'd thought of that'.

Though Bernstein's skills as a conductor and, more importantly, a communicator were, like Furtwängler, highly organic – the fruit of intensive study and great familiarity with the music – few lived 'in the moment' as he did. And in the moment he could take orchestras and audiences deeper into a piece than all the preparation in the world could have predicted. This led, as Rob has suggested, to some boldly expansive tempos, some of which proved problematic when reproduced time and again in a recording. His famously personal live account of the Tchaikovsky *Pathétique* culminates in a final *Adagio* significantly longer than any on disc by virtue of searching silences and rubatos that only a very special collusion between conductor and players (and audience) could achieve. I remember asking one or two New York Philharmonic string players if they recalled those live performances as being especially slow? Not at all, they said – in the moment, under Bernstein's spell, it took as long as it took.

There's a very particular kind of musical telepathy involved in achieving the kind of interpretative freedom and flexibility that Bernstein did. Spiritual emanations and his legendary body language were always key. His ability to communicate the reasons for the notes, the shape of a beautiful phrase, the characterisation of a moment – these were things which went way beyond a commanding stick technique and an acute ear for balance and detail, and into the realms of truly communicating *feeling*. And in that regard, and taking just one composer, one really could go so far as to say that Bernstein became or *was* Mahler.

Rob Cowan believes Bernstein's 1961 recording of Mahler's Third Symphony with the New York Philharmonic to be one of the finest Mahler performances in half a century. I'll go further and suggest that the final *Adagio* has never been equalled in my experience. It remains a lasting testament to what happens when great music and an inspirational interpreter find each other. 



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BERNSTEIN AT 100

A believer in new beginnings

Endlessly inventive, always genre-hopping, Bernstein had unwavering faith in the ability of music to say anything, any way it liked. Why then, asks **Edward Seckerson**, did he find it so hard to believe in himself?

There wasn't much that Leonard Bernstein didn't try his hand at, at least once – and wanting, *needing*, to experience it all applied as surely to the music he wrote as to the music he conducted. 'Finding himself' as a composer was something that preoccupied him for a number of years – he searched, he experimented, he dabbled in atonality, in numerology (his ballet *Dybbuk*), he redefined the boundaries of 'theatre', turning song-cycles into theatrical happenings (*Arias and Barcarolles* and *Songfest*) and morphing a requiem into a universal theatre-piece cum protest song (*Mass*). In his music, as in life, he was always 'on stage'.

But his searching for the Bernstein we know and love when all the time he was right there for the taking was driven by a need to be first among equals with his peers. In an interview he gave to me in these pages a year before he died, he spoke candidly about his disappointment that none of his compositions had been taken seriously by contemporaries he had grown up with and even studied with. He was not regarded as 'cutting edge' (his words, not theirs). But the criticism, if such it was, was unspoken.

So why did that bother him? Why did he feel the need to be persuaded that his Broadway works

were something more than just masterpieces of a popular genre, that *West Side Story* was an opera (requiring opera singers), that *Candide* was an operetta, not a dazzling pastiche of one? That *A Quiet Place* was 'a tough piece' (again his words), tougher than it needed to be, than he wanted it to be? Why was it so hard just being himself?

The irony, of course, was that the music that

exuded from the life-affirming dynamo that was Leonard Bernstein needed no special pleading. Was there ever a piece more self-assured, more fully

formed in its confidence and ebullience and personal identity than his Jerome Robbins ballet *Fancy Free*? From it grew a musical – *On the Town* – which redefined the role that dance could play in musical theatre and poignantly, very poignantly, was set in the year in which it was composed, 1944, a time when American servicemen and women enjoyed shore leave that they knew all too well could possibly be their last. It is a far more important piece than Bernstein and others have ever given it credit for being. To him and those unnamed peers it was *just* a musical. To the rest of us it was a game-changer.

There's irony, too, in the words of a great song from that show, 'Some other time': 'Where has the time all gone to, haven't done half the things we

*In his music, as in life,
he was always 'on stage'*

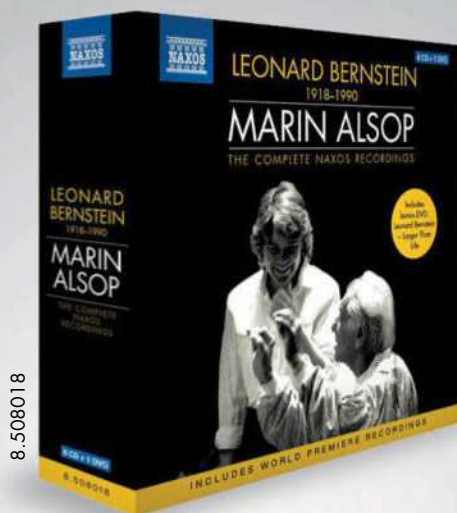




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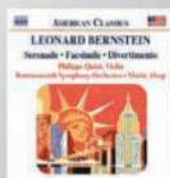
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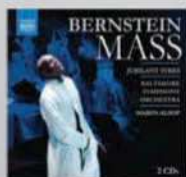
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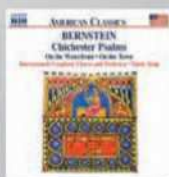
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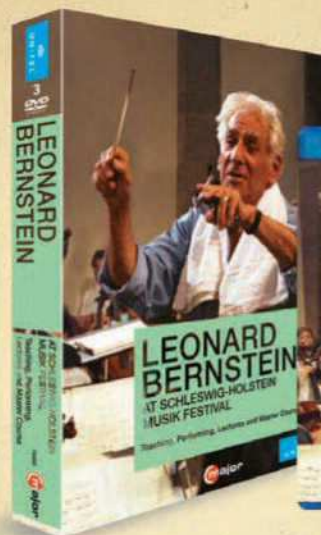


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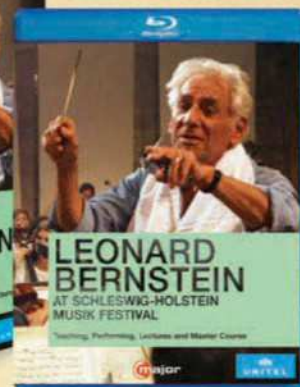


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(Main picture) The original cast of *Fancy Free* plus choreographer Jerome Robbins, far right; Bernstein, Robbins, Betty Comden and Adolphe Green, the creative team behind *On the Town*



want to / Oh, well, we'll catch up some other time ...' Betty Comden and Adolph Green wrote those words, but Bernstein lived them. And had he lived a little longer he'd have seen a sea-change in attitudes to his music and maybe, too, the balance would have shifted away from conducting in favour of composition. That was his plan. He spoke to me of the beginnings of ideas, of a multi-lingual opera chronicling the lives of survivors from the Second World War; he reeled off a list of eminent musicians he had promised works to. There was never any shortage of takers.

Perhaps the most finely tuned of all his gifts was his way with words – his own and those of others. He had a special way with the music of words. Coming back to musicals for a moment, his five Broadway shows (a sixth, *Peter Pan*, was never performed in its entirety) all marked the start of a long and determined quest to establish and propagate a very particular brand of 'American opera' ('music theatre' might have been a better catch-all term), something that would propel the American lyric stage to new and exciting places. His last piece for that genre – *1600 Pennsylvania Avenue* (written with Alan Jay Lerner) – was blighted by the pressure on Bernstein's time and an over-extension of ambition: democracy

*To Bernstein and his unnamed peers,
On the Town was just a musical.
To the rest of us it was a game-changer*

enshrined in the history of one building. But a new direction was proclaimed in the score and the way forward would be marked out (as Bernstein always predicted) by the likes of Stephen Sondheim. And while we're rewriting the history of American music theatre, one can only wonder at what Bernstein would have made of Lin-Manuel Miranda's *Hamilton*. It's the sort of piece one might see him imagining while going through his hip-hop phase.

He embraced music in all its diversity and gravitated to pieces where he might rejoice in some

legitimate genre-hopping. *Songfest* sings America in ways that *1600 Pennsylvania Avenue*, hopelessly bogged down by its own pretensions, fails to do. *Songfest* celebrates the American Bicentennial

by looking at the diversity of the nation – and the challenges therein – through the eyes of 13 diverse poets. The music is refracted through their sensibilities so that the secretive expression of Walt Whitman's sexuality – 'To what you said' – becomes Lenny's *Morgen!* with a solo cello songfully expressing what the words could only subtly allude to. And because everything, Bernstein truly believed, came from somewhere, note how the trio of female voices assigned to Anne Bradstreet's poem 'To my dear and loving husband' is so redolent of the

quartet of female voices concluding Act 2, scene 1 of Britten's *Peter Grimes*. Those women are also reflecting on their menfolk. Surely then, a discreet 'homage'. Remember that Bernstein conducted the American premiere of *Grimes* in 1946.

It's no secret that this commentator regards *Mass – A Theatre Piece for Players, Singers and Dancers* as Bernstein's most important and far-reaching work. And that's not just because of its challenging stance on religious dogma and, more importantly, the relevance of it to us all, collectively and individually, as human beings. Of equal significance is the way in which it puts music at the sharp end of that challenge, celebrating its universality, its ability to transcend all social, political, linguistic, and indeed religious divides. The Lord's Prayer becomes a 12-tone row from which a torch song, a show tune, a bluesy or rocky anthem might emerge. Music can say anything, any way it likes – that's Bernstein's creed – and in *Mass* he doesn't just say it, he does it. It's the piece in which he truly puts his money where his mouth is.

Bernstein always enjoyed the *gamesmanship* of composition – the technical processes by which he could wholly express how he felt and what he hoped to communicate. Sometimes, if he was trying too hard, the 'cleverness' was in danger of obscuring the expressive intentions. In *Dybbuk* I hear the techniques more than I hear the music. And in conceiving his opera *A Quiet Place*



Jerome Robbins (left) in discussion with Leonard Bernstein during *Dybbuk* rehearsals for New York City Ballet in 1974

as a quasi-operatic symphony – with each of its four acts cast as a movement of individual character – he underlined the process more than the emerging drama. In other words, it was the technique dictating the drama as opposed to the drama dictating the technique.

But equally his grasp of variational techniques in two of his finest works – *Serenade* for solo violin, harp, percussion and strings and *Symphony No 2, The Age of Anxiety* – could hardly serve his purpose more eloquently. Both are inspired by literary works: Plato's *Symposium* on the nature of



Bernstein (centre, wearing a white jacket) in buoyant spirits after conducting the American premiere of *Peter Grimes* by Benjamin Britten (far left) at Tanglewood in 1946



Bernstein flanked by cast members of the 1971 touring production of *Candide*

love and WH Auden's dazzling epic poem, respectively. Both excite musical debate and development. The heart of the *Serenade* is an aching slow movement, 'Agathon', but its thematic derivation is what gives it such resonance. Even the unsuspecting untutored listener will subliminally pick up on how the transformation of a single thematic idea can encompass such diversity of mood and emotion.

Bernstein enjoyed the gamesmanship of composition – the technical processes by which he could express how he felt

In the Second Symphony (with its self-identifying solo piano part), Auden's search for answers to perennial questions about our existence is philosophically mirrored by Bernstein's ingenious compositional trick of making something more evolutionary out of his sets of variations. Each variation picks up on the tail-end of the previous one using only the concluding phrase as a starting point for the next. So the past shapes the future, but each time it does there's a new beginning.

Bernstein loved new beginnings. Many of his works end with a moment of catharsis, a sense of possibility forged from the heartache and disappointment of what has gone before. He was, to my mind, a glass-half-full kind of guy. And that spirit of optimism infuses so much of what he achieved in his music. The end of the Second Symphony is a new day thunderously dawning, another long walk to the bright horizon – like longshoreman Marlon Brando at the close of *On the Waterfront* (Bernstein's one and only film score); the kinship is inescapable. Then there is the healing chorale at the close of *Mass*, the major/minor sadness and hope of the closing measures of *West Side Story* and the hymnic 'Make our garden grow' (the best of all possible tunes) at the close of *Candide*. Things will be ok. They *have* to be OK.

Leonard Bernstein once said that to achieve greatness, two things were necessary: a plan and not *quite* enough time. Would that those words had not turned out to be so true.

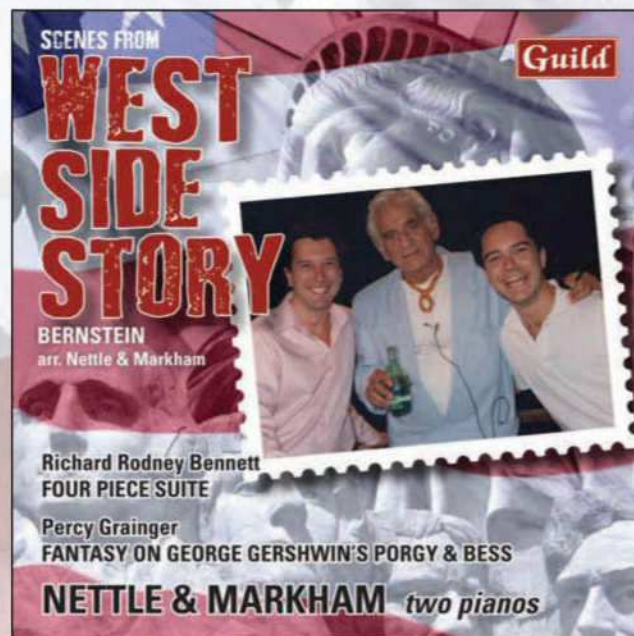
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Communicating a love of humanity, a plea for world harmony and a desire to live life through music was at the heart of Bernstein the musician, writes **Michael McManus**

That Leonard Bernstein was complex and multifaceted is a given, but if any one characteristic of this extraordinary man could sum up or define him, it would be his love of – and faith in – the infinite power of communication. By this I mean communication in all its varying elements: communication between individuals, between faiths, between cultures, between races, between philosophies and schools of thought, between different generations, between everyone and anyone. Furthermore, for Bernstein, the *lingua franca* that could always, unfailingly, facilitate communication – and, in the process, wash away prejudice and jealousy, make nonsense of war, and eradicate famine – was not English or French or any contrivance of a spoken tongue, but music. He held tonality to be more than the quirk of a keyboard: he believed it was tonality and the music it made that united us all as human beings. In his mind, therefore – and to paraphrase ‘Music I heard’ by Conrad Aiken, which Bernstein set in his *Songfest* – music was more than music: it was the most profound expression of our common humanity. These deeper considerations and wider thoughts were fundamental to him. As a pedagogue, as a composer, as a performing musician – whichever Bernstein we saw and heard – this love of people, peace and harmony was at the fore.

I still find it hard to believe, even embarrassing, but the first time I met Leonard Bernstein I knew hardly anything about him. He was appearing at the Barbican Hall in the final symphonic concert of the groundbreaking ‘Mahler, Vienna and the Twentieth Century’ series, a two-part adventure in 1985 pioneered by Clive Gillinson and the LSO, which presented Mahler’s entire oeuvre to the London public. On this occasion, one balmy Sunday in June, the orchestra was the Concertgebouw, the concertmaster was Jaap van Zweden, now Bernstein’s latest successor as Music Director of the New York Philharmonic – and the piece was Symphony No 9, beginning with the sounds of Mahler’s ailing heart and ending in the silence of the abyss. I vividly recall how, in this city of invasive applause, Bernstein held the moment at the end of the piece for what seemed like an eternity, forcing us all to strain to hear as sound inaudibly faltered into silence; and well beyond that point of no return. It was an extraordinary performance by any standards (the DG recording, made a week earlier in

Amsterdam, gives a flavour of it, but no more than that, at least to my rose-tinted ears) and my mother and I determined, as the sustained cheers of a deeply moved audience died down at last, to meet the man responsible.

By the time I headed back to school that evening, I had spent a full hour sitting at the feet of the great man while he talked, listened and zealously sipped at his chilled whisky. We had discussed Gustav Mahler, Thomas Mann, The Three Choirs Festival and much else besides – and my abiding memory was that he didn’t merely give his ready audience the benefit of his own extensive knowledge; he genuinely listened to me and took pleasure in my youthful enthusiasm, not only for the concert I had just heard, but also for the nooks and crannies of German literature, political activism and much else besides. A sizeable crowd was crammed into his Green Room as we talked, and at least fivefold that number was waiting impatiently outside.

I suppose I was selfish, but I knew at once that I was in the presence not only of a musical titan – the Mahler performance had proved that – but also of a teacher, a wise man, a rabbi in the truest sense of the word. I had witnessed, too, how this genius – an overused epithet, but here, for once, aptly applied – appreciated and adored words, the sound of words, the essence of music – and, above all, people and an audience. In the months and years that followed, I immersed myself in the life, times and artistic endeavours of a man I already knew simply as ‘Lenny’. I learned about *West Side Story*, *Candide*, the classic CBS Mahler cycle – and his numerous writings, which at once challenged my assumptions and perceptions, broadened my horizons, deepened my artistic appreciation and brought seemingly boundless personal illumination. Between 1985 and 1989, both in London and also in Vienna, I met him many times and we spoke again at length too, though perhaps never again with quite the same sense of timelessness.

In his riveting Norton Lectures, given at Harvard in 1973, Bernstein ‘the professor’ took the opportunity to set out in painstaking detail his philosophy of music, of wider aesthetics and of life itself. He made no distinction between a philosophy of art and a philosophy of life. For him, music was innate – and tonality, too, was innate, as much a question of physics as of the soul. In those lectures, he formulated a fresh and bracing analysis, positing that tonality was founded not just in the

In Bernstein’s mind, music was more than music: it was the most profound expression of our common humanity



For Leonard Bernstein, music was 'a means by which the human condition could be improved'

vibration of man-made strings, but also in human speech itself. Never did it occur to him to keep these thoughts to himself. He also made no distinction between his artistic expression, his calling as a teacher and his often outspoken use of the many platforms that his fame afforded him. Music was life, he always believed, but it was in no sense an end in itself: it was a means by which the human condition could be improved.

This desire to engage extended far beyond purely artistic endeavours. It is a matter of record that Leonard Bernstein exploded into the public consciousness in November 1943, when he substituted for the flu-stricken Bruno Walter in a performance conducting the New York Philharmonic. By the year end, as one of the brightest new celebrities in a gloomy, war-time firmament, he had conducted the orchestra again and soon found himself in demand for morale-boosters and fundraisers. He also began to associate with left-wing causes, sending greetings to a gathering of young activists who were identified by the FBI as a successor organisation to the Young Communists.

What has been somewhat underplayed in most of the extensive biographical literature about Bernstein is how his wider engagement in public life almost cost him his career. There is certainly nothing unusual in a high-profile individual in the creative arts publicly espousing 'progressive' or 'liberal' causes. To the #MeToo generation, anyone who fails to do so runs the risk of being shunned, ostracised or even effectively

blacklisted. Awards ceremonies, Clinton fundraisers – today such lustrous occasions are invariably adorned with the wealthy, creative and celebrated. It was not always so. After the twin successes of *Fancy Free* and *On The Town* in 1944, Bernstein was very much the name on people's lips, and everyone wanted him to be associated with their cause. The causes he chose to support were overwhelmingly of the progressive left, promoting the welfare of the Soviet people and the struggle against Franco.

Until the end of the Second World War, that position remained respectable, consistent indeed with the policies of the Roosevelt administration and the united front against the Axis powers. The sudden change after 1945 caught many people by surprise and found Bernstein to be less fleet of foot than one might have expected. It wasn't long before he was being denounced by anti-Communist informants to the FBI, and he was one of the first major artists to catch the eye of the House Un-American Activities Committee (the HUAC), which was only now cranking itself up. In February 1946 Bernstein planned to address a dinner in San Francisco under the auspices of the Joint Anti-Fascist Refugee Committee, but no less a figure than Arthur Judson, the head of his management firm, directly forbade him to do so. Times were indeed a-changing.

By 1947, Harry Truman had all but abandoned Roosevelt's New Deal politics and Bernstein was among the first supporters of the new Progressive Party, headed by Henry Wallace, who had been sacked by Truman as secretary of commerce for advocating a peace treaty with the USSR. In those troubled times, Bernstein publicly supported the composer Hanns Eisler, who faced deportation because of his Communist

sympathies, and also joined Humphrey Bogart in defending Hollywood artists who were under attack from the HUAC. By 1950, Bernstein was 'off limits' for CBS, banned from official State Department functions overseas and, between 1951 and 1956, did not conduct the New York Philharmonic once. He withdrew entirely from conducting for a time and retreated to a holiday home in Mexico. For a few months in 1953, the authorities refused to renew his passport – until he signed an affidavit, partly clarifying his political associations and partly renouncing them. His idealism had certainly taken a knock. Once Bernstein's rehabilitation was complete, he rapidly became ubiquitous.

He was duly offered the reins at the New York Philharmonic and he pioneered the now-legendary Young People's Concerts. Although the films can be fuzzy and the production values may seem archaic, for their combination of charm, substance and engagement, these have never been matched, still less exceeded. Watching them through modern eyes, it is immediately striking that the audience consists almost entirely of white, middle-class kids and their prosperous-looking parents. Nonetheless, these were broadcast nationwide and the contribution they made to wider access to musical understanding, for adults and children alike, cannot be overstated. This was a dazzling revolution in communication. On March 24, 1965, he risked not only his career but potentially a sniper's bullet too, when he joined the Stars for Freedom Rally, a makeshift concert



At the Stars for Freedom rally in 1965, a concert organised by Harry Belafonte (right, with Bernstein at his birthday party in 1968)

organised by Harry Belafonte, which brought together the likes of Sammy Davis Jr, Mahalia Jackson, Tony Bennett, Joan Baez and Nina Simone, to play, sing and inspire 25,000 civil-rights marchers to continue their historic march from Selma to Montgomery, Alabama.

With his career at its zenith, Bernstein still knew which side he was on. On only one occasion did his views seriously threaten his wider reputation, when his wife Felicia hosted

a fundraiser in their flat to help fund bail applications by members of the Black Panthers. This prompted widespread derision and, in the wake of the event, the writer Tom Wolfe first coined the term 'radical chic', mocking the Bernsteins and accusing them and their associates of posturing naivety. I can well imagine Bernstein wincing at that.

If we look through Bernstein's catalogue of works for political content, arguably three pieces stand out, none of them among his most frequently played or popular. There were certainly political overtones in his chamber opera *Trouble in Tahiti*, which gently satirised the suburban American dream, but it was

the better a production usually works.

Bernstein's first overtly political work was his iconoclastic *Mass*, written for the opening of the new Kennedy Center in Washington DC and also to commemorate the life of

his beloved friend John F Kennedy. Laden with echoes of the previous decade, 'flower power' and the peace movement, *Mass* took time to bed down in people's affections, even of Bernstein's

greatest devotees. Today, it is rightly considered to be one of his finest works. It reveals not only a crisis of faith, but also a deep cynicism about public life, not least in its most celebrated quatrain ('a Christmas present from Paul Simon'): 'Half of the people are stoned and the other half are waiting for the next election. Half the people are drowned and the other half are swimming in the wrong direction.' As every totem is toppled, ultimately peace and unity are found: in musical harmony.

The Republican-dominated era of Richard Nixon, Watergate and Gerald Ford filled Bernstein with understandable horror and this was reflected in some of his most remarkable artistic

statements, including his one copper-bottomed failure, the musical *1600 Pennsylvania Avenue*, again a musically splendid piece sunk by 'book issues'. This promising conjunction of talents focused initially upon the US Bicentennial, but increasingly upon race relations, with white superiors upstairs and black servants below. It suffered from more than an excess of expectations. Its central 'play within a play' conceit was excessively artful and confusing; and many of Alan Jay Lerner's lyrics were far from his best.

Creatives came and went during the out-of-town run and, by the time the piece did

Bernstein's first overtly political work was his Mass. As every totem is toppled, peace and unity are found: in music harmony



Bernstein and cast at the opening-night curtain-call of *Mass*, which opened the new Kennedy Center in Washington DC in 1971

reach Broadway, an awful reputation preceded it. Its political edge had been watered down at the behest of nervous investors and nothing could save it. The original, angry words to the anthemic finale 'To make us proud' ('To burn with pride and not with shame, each time I hear my country's name') had been watered down beyond recognition and the piece was a mess. 'I hate it ... [it's] drastically different,' wrote Bernstein. '[It's] not the show I wrote ... I don't even want to think about it.' Bernstein's long-term assistant Harry Kraut loathed the piece with a vengeance, but, after two decades, much of its musical material was rescued in the *White House Cantata*, using Bernstein's original orchestrations alongside those by his childhood friend and long-term associate Sid Ramin (who had co-arranged *West Side Story*) and Hershy Kay, who had originally arranged *Candide*. The piece was premiered and recorded not in the US but in London, where, nearly two decades later, it has still never been significantly revived.

Such a man as Bernstein lives on in the minds, hearts and values of all who crossed his path. The song never ends

Written at much the same time was Bernstein's *Songfest*, a collection of settings of American poetry, almost all of it on the subject of minorities and people oppressed. Here, Bernstein's music, sometimes gently, sometimes uproariously, sets and supports expressions of outrage, wry comment and utter, exquisite tenderness. Race, the role of women in society, the class system and, in Walt Whitman's almost unbearably touching poem, 'To what you said', the heartbreak associated with the love that dared not speak its name – homosexuality. The onset of the dreadful HIV-AIDS epidemic was lurking just around the corner and, while never fully acknowledging his own sexual preferences in public, Bernstein would become a vigorous campaigner in his later years for better care for those suffering from HIV-AIDS and also for research into the condition.

As a schoolboy I was a lazy student of the clarinet who used an unexpected change of school as an opportunity to give up the instrument entirely. I then discovered my passion for music just a little too late. Bernstein was not the first great musician I encountered, but he was undoubtedly the first great man of the theatre whom I ever met – and the first genuine world figure. As I look back on my own activities in and around the world of politics, see my first play go on, workshop a piece of musical theatre and endeavour to organise a first professional semi-staging of Bernstein's own black sheep the *White House Cantata* here in the UK, how I wish I could go back to that Barbican conductor's room and find Bernstein somehow there again. I can only imagine how he'd listen and smile and sip on his whisky, as I'd tell him what he still means to me and how he inspired me and changed my life for the better. Such a man inevitably lives on in the minds, hearts and values of all who were fortunate enough to have crossed his path. The song never ends, and neither does his invaluable gift of communication. The conducting, the playing, the composing – all that extraordinary musical output will forever guarantee that Bernstein is remembered and celebrated. But his most precious legacy to those of us who had the privilege of knowing him is surely that we are less judgemental, more thoughtful and, perhaps, also a little bit kinder and more accepting than we might otherwise have been – in music and in life.

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With some help from DG and Sony's new box-sets, Rob Cowan explores Bernstein the polymath: heir to Furtwängler, unique Mahler interpreter and, as pianist, remarkable in Mozart and Brahms

LEONARD BERNSTEIN: AN HEIR TO FURTWÄNGLER?

Back in the dark days immediately after 9/11, I was preparing a BBC radio programme marking the 50th anniversary of Wilhelm Furtwängler's death. Among the musicians I interviewed for the occasion was Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau, who famously recorded the role of Kurwenal in *Tristan und Isolde* with Furtwängler, as well as Mahler's *Lieder eines fahrenden gesellen*. Before I took my leave of his Berlin home I asked Fischer-Dieskau whether there was any one musician who, in his view, would have been worthy of accepting Furtwängler's mantle, and his answer was instantaneous: Leonard Bernstein.

So why Bernstein? Well, think about it. Both men were composers at heart whose 'day job' was conducting, and both were closely associated with the Vienna Philharmonic. Furtwängler died in 1954, which also happens to be the year that Bernstein composed his pivotal film score for *On the Waterfront* (Furtwängler wrote his Third Symphony in the same year) and made the first of his television lectures for the CBS arts programme *Omnibus*. That live lecture, entitled 'Beethoven's Fifth Symphony', dealt with a work that was central to Furtwängler's repertoire, as it was to Bernstein's own. And there was the tricky question of race. In 1939, when Europe's impending war finally broke out and the engines of anti-Semitism started to rev uncontrollably, the Jewish Bernstein majored in music with a final-year thesis entitled 'The Absorption of Race Elements into American Music'. During that same period, Furtwängler was at constant loggerheads with the Nazi authorities in defence of Jewish musicians, often in public.

So there you have some significant shared priorities, not least idealism, humanitarian principles, teeming creativity, intellectual rigour, and a passionate interest in the arts beyond music. Both men were of their time, Furtwängler born shortly before his beloved Bruckner commenced composition of his Ninth Symphony, Bernstein just six years after the publication of WC Handy's *Memphis Blues* and not all that long before the bombshell premiere of George Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue*, a work that he played with incomparable panache (performances are included by both DG and Sony Classical on their box-sets). And while Bernstein's involvement with the great Austro-German classics would last until his death in 1990,

his cosmopolitan compositions were also steeped in blues, jazz and what's known as *Yiddishkeit* (or the quality of being Jewish).

SHARED GOALS IN BEETHOVEN AND BRAHMS

But did the two musicians share a common *interpretative* vision? In some respects I'd say that they did, and never more so than in two particular live readings of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony. Furtwängler's final Bayreuth performance (August 1954 on Orfeo) plays for 75 minutes, while Bernstein's from 1989, included in the DG set – recorded at the Berlin Schauspielhaus in celebration of the fall of the Berlin Wall, and featuring players from various orchestras – is just three minutes longer. Both feature accounts of the *Adagio molto e cantabile* that hover around the 20-minute mark. You need only sample the opening minutes of both to hear a shared serenity, not merely through

their breadth of utterance but in the way the musical line is sustained – no mean feat at that sort of tempo. Granted, both musicians were merely months from death when those recordings were made,

The weight of history had contributed to the visionary aspects of both Furtwängler and Bernstein's Beethoven 9 performances

but there seems little doubt in my mind that the weight of then-recent history had in both cases contributed to the visionary, at times palliative, aspects of their performances.

Perhaps even more relevant I would say is Bernstein's 1967 New York recording of Schubert's *Great C* major (Sony) where, near the start of the first movement, Bernstein, like Furtwängler, accelerates wildly from the *Andante* into the *Allegro*. I might also cite Bernstein's Vienna performances of late Beethoven quartets for full strings (DG), Op 131 especially, which benefit from a very Furtwänglerian mastery of musical transitions. One might expect that Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde* (DG) would provide yet another parallel with Furtwängler, and to a limited extent Bernstein's 1981 Munich recording does – its best act being the Third, which is charged with drama, while the Second (where you would have expected Bernstein to pull out all the emotional stops) enjoys the benefits of relative restraint. As to the other Bernstein-led operas, *La bohème* (DG) leaves its best moments until last – so much beforehand is sadly underprojected – whereas on the Sony set there's a visceral *Der Rosenkavalier* and a somewhat relentless *Falstaff* (with Fischer-Dieskau sounding less than idiomatic in the title-role). Two more operas meanwhile, *Carmen* and *Fidelio*



(both included in the DG box-set), are filled with a believable sense of theatre.

MAHLER IN NEW YORK AND EUROPE

Having played the Furtwängler card, it's as well to stress that Bernstein's earliest palpable rostrum influences were Serge Koussevitzky at Tanglewood and Fritz Reiner at Curtis (he studied with both men) and, inevitably, the twin peaks of Dimitri Mitropoulos and Bruno Walter in New York. Maybe Arturo Toscanini, too (my supposition), whose red-blooded approach to Tchaikovsky is approximately mirrored in Bernstein's electrifying 1957 Sony account of the *Romeo and Juliet* Fantasy Overture, while Walter's Brahms finds a credible parallel in Bernstein's wonderful 1962 New York account of the composer's Fourth Symphony (also in the Sony set), the Brahms preferable to either version included by DG (ie in New York on Decca or with the VPO). Sony also includes a genial account of Brahms's lovely Second Serenade, the first work that Bernstein broadcast as a conductor.

As with Walter and Mitropoulos, surely no composer affected Bernstein more profoundly than Gustav Mahler, whose work he championed tirelessly throughout his career; the evidence of recordings that he left us, both live and studio, official and 'bootleg', suggests a constantly evolving approach to Mahler's music. The impact of Bernstein's Mahler hit me early. In 1969 when still just a slip of a lad, I worked at the BBC Radio 3 Proms office where I got to know Deryck Cooke. I recall a conversation about Mahler's Seventh, and Bernstein's recording of it in particular, which Cooke had reviewed in these pages for the June 1966 issue. What had excited me about Cooke's review was his reference to the 'phantasmagoric atmosphere [... which] is ultimately achieved

through an exhibition of far-out orchestration which is phenomenal even for Mahler'. Bernstein aside, that night Jascha Horenstein happened to be performing the symphony with the New Philharmonia at the Proms and Cooke urged me to attend. 'You *have* to hear the Seventh "live",' is what he said. So I took his prompt but with Bernstein's vivid recording burned on to my musical consciousness I was amazed at just how much I *didn't* hear, whether because of where I was sitting, or the Hall itself, or indeed the performance (now out on BBC Legends), which, although undoubtedly sympathetic to the spirit of the score, seemed so much less dynamic than Bernstein's.

Revisiting that Bernstein reading, now in the context of Sony's 100-CD collection 'Leonard Bernstein: The Remastered Edition', reignites my enthusiasm for the performance, its drollness and dusky atmosphere, its warmth and sheer sense of devilry, especially in the Scherzo. By 1985, when Bernstein re-recorded the Seventh with the same orchestra for DG, his performance had broadened noticeably and the level of tension had dipped. The Scherzo had both tamed and lost focus and the finale sounded more shambolic than it had done in the mid-'60s. In the Sixth, the 1988 Vienna Philharmonic recording reveals less inner detail than its 1967 New York predecessor and some of the playing is decidedly below par: compare 11'36" into the finale in Vienna with the same passage at 10'10" in New York and the difference is striking. The sample points are in themselves revealing, and so are the overall timings: the Vienna finale plays for 33'06", the New York for 28'42".

I've always had a fondness for

Bernstein's heartfelt 1960 New York recording of the Fourth (Sony): Reri Grist's childlike soprano strikes me as ideal in the finale, whereas having a boy soprano sing that same movement (as happens on the 1987 DG Concertgebouw remake) is, to my ears, an ill fit. This is a child's view of heaven as envisioned in folklore and expressed in performance by an adult. The child element is idealised rather than actual. Then again, for those who feel as I do on this issue, DG also provides a DVD of a fine 1974 performance with soprano Edith Mathis, one of numerous filmed Mahler performances included by DG that predate its audio disc equivalents by a decade or more. In general I prefer them and, with Humphrey Burton directing, you're assured that the main visual prompt is the score rather than a director's indulgent whim.

Bernstein's 1961 New York Philharmonic recording of the Third Symphony for Sony is surely one of the great Mahler recordings of the last century, as comprehensive a view of this magical mystery as we're ever likely to experience via any recording format. DG's 1987 remake (also from New York)



(Top) Beethoven's Ninth as the Berlin Wall falls in '89; a young Bernstein at Carnegie with the New York Phil

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A young Sondheim working with Bernstein on *West Side Story* as lyricist; recording the work for DG

is almost as good, and certainly better engineered, if not quite as finely observed. Regarding Mahler's Ninth, Sony's 1965 New York version is an urgently played prophecy of an interpretative viewpoint that would broaden and mature with age, most tellingly on the 1985 recording with the Concertgebouw Orchestra, which is far preferable to a live 1979 recording with Berlin Philharmonic (Bernstein's only encounter with the BPO) where there are times when the orchestra sounds as if it's on the brink of collapse, and not in a good way. Both are on DG. Live versions of the Ninth from Israel and Boston are available elsewhere. And, keeping with the epic perspective, there's Bernstein's 1981 Orchestre National de France recording of Franck's D minor Symphony (DG), a broad, dark, tonally opulent reading, and ultimately heroic too. The first overpowering climax sets the scene for a remarkable performance. The powerhouse account of Roussel's magnificent Third Symphony on the same CD is scarcely less remarkable.

THE ROMANTIC WORKS, AND BERNSTEIN IN BERNSTEIN

Another symphony that Bernstein consistently handled with loving care was Schumann's Second. He recorded the whole Schumann symphony cycle twice (Sony and DG), the Second Symphony additionally in 1953 for American Decca with the New York Stadium Symphony (consisting of members of the New York Philharmonic). Interestingly, the tempos on the 1953 Decca (DG) recording and the Sony New York version from 10 years later are near-on identical, excepting for the *Adagio espressivo* which was to broaden by a minute. And yet it doesn't actually *sound* slower, the reason being that on the later New York recording textures are so much clearer, the whole production far lighter on its feet. By 1985 in Vienna, the *Adagio* had stretched from 12'52" to 13'47" (the original Decca version is 11'53") and, this time, the reduced tempo does cause an easing of tension. Regarding slow tempos, there's also the famously long-breathed account of Elgar's 'Nimrod' with the BBC Symphony Orchestra, part of a still-controversial complete account of the work (DG), and the slow movements on late DG remakes of Dvořák's *New World* and Tchaikovsky's *Pathétique* symphonies, the latter being considerably more successful than the former. In fact, you only really notice just how slowly you've been travelling when you reach the very end of the work. There and there alone, the tension starts to flag. Breadth of utterance also distinguishes Bernstein's Vienna remakes of the Brahms symphonies.

Early Bernstein performances are well documented on CD elsewhere, not least his November 1943 New York Philharmonic debut and the multi-CD collection 'Leonard Bernstein Live' (both put out by the orchestra in question), whereas numerous

lightning strikes inform West Hill Radio Archives' 12-CD set 'Leonard Bernstein Historical Recordings, 1941-1961', including a Boston Mahler *Resurrection* from 1949 and a New York Stravinsky *Rite* from 1951, though you'll frequently need to listen *through* rather than *to* the sound.

Regarding the two anniversary box-sets under review, DG's 'Leonard Bernstein at 100' includes various standard-repertoire symphonies recorded with the Stadium Symphony Orchestra of New York already alluded to, with highly approachable explanatory lectures added (also included are lectures from much later on), while Sony includes early recordings of Stravinsky, Milhaud and the earlier Copland sessions, as well as music by Bernstein himself, which is a subject on its own.

In many cases I gravitate to the raunchy New York sound of the Sony recordings of Bernstein conducting Bernstein (Copland, too), in the *Kaddish* Symphony for example, which, in spite of its sacred subtext and declamatory narration, is full of post-*Waterfront* rage that isn't quite captured on the Israel Philharmonic remake (DG). It's largely a question of idiom, and though, in general, the IPO recordings are compelling, they don't generate the inward fire or suggest the level of 'street cred' that their predecessors claimed as their birthright (and with so much of Bernstein's music – not just *West Side Story* – you need to feel those high-risers and fire escapes nearby).

Speaking very generally (and personally), his ballets, symphonies, orchestral works and theatre pieces fare particularly well on Sony (*West Side Story*, the ultimate Bernstein masterpiece, especially), though the later-flowering DG *Candide* is very special. The IPO sessions are, to be truthful, inconsistent: on the one hand, the orchestra's account of Mendelssohn's *Italian* Symphony is infinitely more satisfying than a flustered New York predecessor (Sony), especially the first movement, whereas Stravinsky in Israel is very much a hit-and-miss affair, invariably with bolts that need tightening.

PROS AND CONS, AND BERNSTEIN AS PIANIST

Making a secure choice between the two sets is quite honestly next to impossible, all the more so because we're not talking a total bill of mere pennies or cents. DG's package brings together Bernstein's entire legacy for the Yellow Label (with one or two Philips/Decca additions), a fairly straightforward task given that the conductor's association with the label was limited to around 15 years. DG has managed it before in two big boxes (the 'Leonard Bernstein Collection', Volumes One and Two), but this is a much neater package than those were. Where repertoire is duplicated with Sony, the DG performances are in the main more spacious than their predecessors, bigger-boned too, and sometimes more imposing (ie the best of the Mahler). I'd say that the highlights of the DG set are the Mahler DVDs, the classical works with the Vienna Philharmonic, late Mozart symphonies especially, and a fine Beethoven symphony cycle (presented here on CD and in its superior remastered edition on Blu-ray) which, although not as gutsy as its New York Philharmonic predecessor (Sony), honours the golden mean with performances that are notably well balanced and nobly conceived. Here Bernstein becomes a good European (in the idealist Nietzschean sense), blending his inborn American flamboyance with aristocratic poise and a fair quota of uniquely Viennese tonal mahogany.

As to Bernstein the pianist, a third set, named just that and recently issued by Sony (11 CDs, including material also



On Sony's piano set, Bernstein excels as soloist, chamber musician and accompanist

featured in 'Leonard Bernstein: The Remastered Edition'), gathers together all Bernstein's piano recordings for that label, either as soloist, chamber music player or accompanist, including an imperious version of Mozart's Piano Concerto No 25 which, in my view, is the finest of his Mozart concerto recordings (the first movement's cadenza, with its multiple quotations, is in itself remarkable). And the song recitals with Christa Ludwig, Walter Berry, Jennie Tourel and Fischer-Dieskau, as well as a superb early recording of Copland's Piano Sonata, figure among that 11-CD set's impressive items. As to the principle sets under review, both Sony and DG offer us Mozart piano concertos (the same ones, Nos 15 and 17, rather more refined in Vienna) and Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue*, whereas DG adds Ravel, and Sony opts for Mozart (Piano Quartet K478) Schumann (Piano Quintet) and Beethoven (First Concerto). But we mustn't forget that wonderful Brahms Lieder recital with Christa Ludwig, included in the 11-CD Sony piano set and also recently reissued by Warner, where Bernstein makes the first song of *Zigeunerlieder* sound for all the world like Bartók's *Out of Doors*. The rest is divine.

In terms of coverage, there's still so much I haven't had space to mention, and for that I sincerely apologise. But I hope you get the general drift of my standpoint. *In toto*, Bernstein's Sony legacy covers a longer period than DG's, which means that any comprehensive CD retrospective demands many more CDs than 100, the sort of magnificent collection Sony has already devoted to Stravinsky, Serkin, Horowitz and Glenn Gould – though, to be fair, their legacies are considerably less sizeable than Bernstein's. Aside from Bernstein's complete Mahler and Sibelius symphonies, both cycles reissued complete more than once (here we're given four of the former and one of the latter), his Sony legacy includes, as I've already mentioned, all nine Beethoven symphonies, of which we're given merely two; he recorded all four Schumann symphonies (here, maddeningly, we have three); he also taped 19 Haydn symphonies, whereas the set under review includes just four; and most disappointingly, his complete Tchaikovsky symphony cycle is represented by a single work, the *Little Russian*. Bernstein recorded the Fourth Symphony,

a work he had a particular feeling for, twice for Sony and what's most frustrating is that the disc of the *Little Russian* included in this set is uncoupled, which means the Fourth could easily have fitted on as well – probably with a short extra fill-up added. Still, as with Mahler's Fourth and other works, DG offers a DVD of a stunning live performance that's roughly contemporaneous with Bernstein's second Sony recording of the Symphony. I doubt many people will be returning to the much later DG CD once they've heard it. The one late DG Tchaikovsky performance that I'm really taken with is *Francesca da Rimini* where, although the NYPO is in less good shape than when Bernstein recorded the work for Sony (included in the latter's set), the final hammering onslaught has to be heard to be believed: it's overwhelming, and the recorded sound does it full justice. And on Sony, a real gem – music from *Swan Lake* played with swagger and panache, and with concertmaster David Nadien incomparably eloquent in the various violin solos.

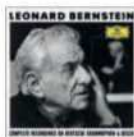
Sony also offers us plenty of repertoire that Bernstein never re-recorded for DG, Harold Shapero's highly impressive *Symphony for Classical Orchestra* being among the most valuable – music indebted to Beethoven as well as to Stravinsky's *Symphony in C*, and which Bernstein conducts with great gusto. And there are countless shorter pieces – overtures, dances, marches, ballet sequences and so on – that remain the sole province of Sony. Many of these are sparkling performances, though there are one or two occasions when you sense that Bernstein rushed into the studio, swallowed the music whole and then rushed out again. But he was a tireless enthusiast with a keen musical instinct which more than makes up for the odd smudge or rough edge. And don't forget those DG DVDs, 36 in all that were not included in the earlier two box-sets – video documents that, in the main, feature repertoire that's also on the CDs, though only rarely the same performances; additionally, there are such valuable extras as Mischa Maisky playing and directing Haydn, and Krystian Zimerman performing the same function in Beethoven's first two piano concertos (thereby completing the concerto cycle – Nos 3-5 are with Bernstein conducting).

So, in closing, I'd say that, given its immense scope and how successfully it has been realised, the DG set (retailing at £459) has to win the palm; it helps that it is also extremely well annotated. But I would still be itching to revisit countless of the Sony recordings (retailing at £170 for the set – though each of the 100 CDs is also available to stream or download). One thing's for sure, at least in my book: no other conductor in living memory was more skilled at conveying why any given composer was driven to write down the notes in the first place. With Bernstein you sense the primal creative source, which is surely a major part of what made him so special. **G**

For a chance to win Sony's new Remastered Edition box-set, see page 9

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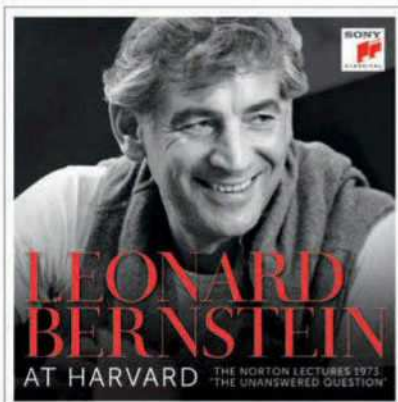
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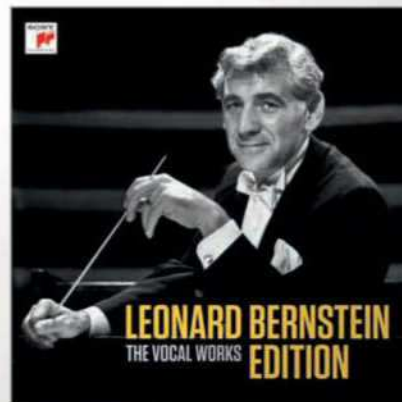
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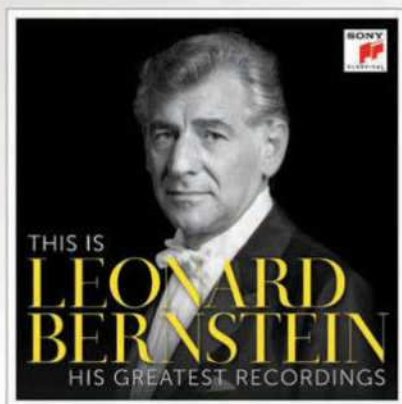
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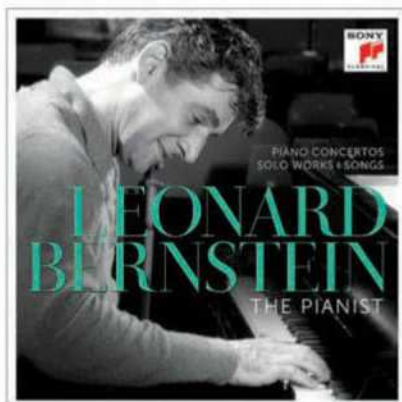
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GRAMOPHONE

RECORDING OF THE MONTH

Mark Pullinger is seduced by a sumptuous new recording of Bizet's *The Pearl Fishers*, demonstrating that there is more to this opera than its famous duet



Bizet

Les pêcheurs de perles

Julie Fuchs *sop* Leïla

Cyrille Dubois *ten* Nadir

Florian Sempey *bar* Zurga

Luc Bertin-Hugault *bass-bar* Nourabad

Les Cris de Paris; Lille National Orchestra /

Alexandre Bloch

Pentatone ② PTC5186 685 (110' • DDD/DSD)

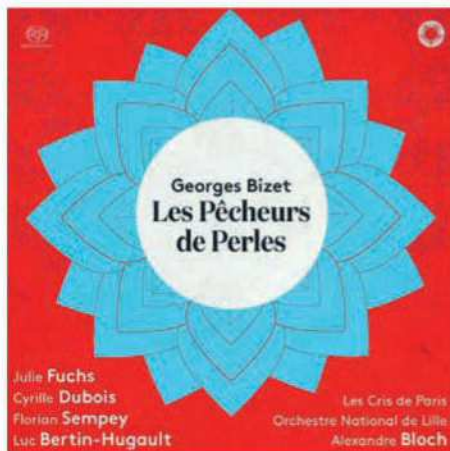
Recorded live at the Nouveau Siècle, Lille,

May 9-11, 2017

Includes synopsis, libretto and translation

Bizet's *The Pearl Fishers* was much maligned for years. Writing in *Le Figaro* after its 1863 premiere, Benjamin Jouvin dismissed it as a 'noisy orgy', declaring: 'There were neither fishermen in the libretto nor pearls in the music.' Later, George Bernard Shaw thought it 'a waste of time and energy'. Only Hector Berlioz, writing in the *Journal des débats*, found merit in the opera: 'The score for *Les pêcheurs de perles* does Monsieur Bizet credit ... arias and duets full of fire and great richness of colour.'

The initial run lasted just 18 performances before the opera fell into oblivion. It was only after Bizet's death that his publisher Choudens wanted to cash in on the success of *Carmen* by resurrecting his earlier operas. *Pearl Fishers* was butchered about and reorchestrated, with new numbers added (including a trio composed by Benjamin Godard), and an ending tacked on where Zurga is killed. Notoriously, that famous duet was revised to bring back the big tune at the close, a version which – admittedly – sounds terrific in concert and established it, largely though the Jussi Björling/Robert Merrill recording, as one of opera's best-loved numbers. But as Brad Cohen



'It's the casting of the central trio of characters where this recording triumphs, with no grit in the musical oyster'



Alexandre Bloch directs a vivid account of Bizet's score

(whose own edition was performed at ENO and is used on a Chandos in English version's 'intimacy and refinement create a quite different atmosphere from the noisy peroration of the posthumous version'.

The tide began to turn in the 1970s, when Arthur Hammond orchestrated sections of the original score which had since been cut. The 1863 version was recorded by Georges Prêtre for EMI in 1977. The autograph score is privately owned, so the best musicologists can do is refer to the conducting score – written over six staves – to get closest to Bizet's original ideas about orchestration. Swiftly following on from Cohen's detective work for Edition Peters, Hugh Macdonald's 2014 reconstruction was published by Bärenreiter, and this is the version used in this splendid new recording on Pentatone, recorded in concert in Lille in May 2017.

Dramatically, the libretto is weak, its plot of two friends in rivalry for the same woman (now a veiled virgin priestess) hinging on the recognition of a necklace. Happily, we don't have to take these considerations into a recording. Alexandre Bloch conducts the Orchestre National de Lille in a vivid account of the score, with muscular playing driving the faster music (a terrific storm) and the exotic dance numbers, while finding the necessary delicacy for the opera's heady lyricism. There are fabulous contributions from the excellent chorus, Les Cris de Paris, as the villagers of the Ceylonese pearl-fishing community.

But it's the casting of the central trio of characters where this recording triumphs, with no grit in the musical oyster. *Pearl Fishers* hasn't fared especially well on disc and there are very few that stand up well to



A new benchmark: Alexandre Bloch directs an exceptionally fine cast in *The Pearl Fishers*, recorded in concert in Lille

scrutiny. Arguably, you have to go back to 1953 for the finest Nadir and Leïla, French-Canadian husband and wife Léopold Simoneau and Pierrette Alarie. Until now. Cyrille Dubois is an outstanding Nadir. He floats his light tenor with honeyed ease in 'Je crois entendre encore', the high B natural at the end exquisitely placed. Easily the loveliest bit of singing I've heard all year. Julie Fuchs's Leïla is no less delectable. Leïla's Act 2 aria 'Comme autrefois dans la nuit sombre' is beautifully sung, as delicate as Ileana Cotrubas (for Prêtre) and less 'mooning' in manner than Janine Micheau (for Pierre Dervaux), warmed by gentle vibrato. Fuchs is far from a wilting flower, though, with just enough steel after her pleas to Zurga to save Nadir's life only to inflame his jealousy.

Zurga is often the weak link on disc, with several woolly baritones on display, the worst of which is the throaty Guillermo Sarabia for Prêtre. Florian Sempy is a superb Zurga here, his lithe baritone strong enough to make him a charismatic leader, shaping his Act 3 aria sensitively as Zurga despairs that his friend is condemned to die at dawn. Sparks fly in his encounter with Fuchs's Leïla. With Luc Bertin-Hugault's sturdy high priest, it's as fine a cast as has been assembled for a recording of *Les pêcheurs de perles* and immediately claims top spot on my shelves. **G**

Selected comparisons:

Dervaux (6/62th) (ERAT) 9029 59348-1

Prêtre (5/78th) (EMI) 5857614-2; (CFP/WARN) 367702-2

Fournet (10/81st) (PHIL) 462 287-2PM2

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Editor's Choice

Martin Cullingford's pick of the finest recordings reviewed in this issue

Orchestral



David Threasher is impressed by Giovanni Antonini's latest Haydn:

'This is playing of a class that has often been denied Haydn, so frequently the victim of rehearse/record schedules' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 39**



Andrew Mellor casts an ear over the music of Svend Erik Tarp:

'We hear a composer trying to break free of Nordic Romanticism and glancing in some fascinating directions' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 47**

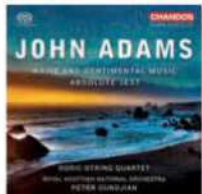
Adams

Absolute Jest^a. Naive and Sentimental Music

^aDoric Quartet; Royal Scottish

National Orchestra / Peter Oundjian

Chandos (F) CHSA5199 (71' • DDD/DSD)



One need only recall the impressive 2013 recording of the *Doctor Atomic Symphony* and the mighty *Harmonielebte* to realise that the Royal Scottish National Orchestra and Peter Oundjian are far from strangers to the music of John Adams. Their latest release is of two other large Adams works: *Absolute Jest* (2011, rev 2012), written for the San Francisco Symphony Orchestra's centenary, and *Naive and Sentimental Music* (1997-98), dedicated to Esa-Pekka Salonen and premiered by him with the Los Angeles Philharmonic. This splendidly engineered Chandos disc is the second recording of both works.

Absolute Jest is not really a concerto for string quartet and orchestra in the grain of Spohr, Elgar or Schoenberg, despite the fearsome demands made on the featured quartet. I like Adams's own description: 'a colossal 25-minute scherzo in which I take fragments of Beethoven's music and subject them to my own peculiar developmental techniques.' It's a staggeringly challenging work for the ensemble, and both the RSNO and the Doric Quartet, led by Oundjian, he of the fine, discriminating ears, acquit themselves magnificently. Savour, for instance, the Quartet's affecting *meno mosso* fourth movement. One might quibble that the RSNO brass lack the heft of San Francisco's but the Scottish percussionists need take a back seat to no one. If the overall performance is without some of the manic, driven energy of San Francisco, all the better for clarity of detail and contour. It may not be manic but it's plenty exciting.

There's a happy inspiration in the pairing of these works, *Absolute Jest*

fashioned out of fragments of Beethoven and the almost twice as long *Naive and Sentimental Music* alluding to Schiller. Despite the fact that both are the products of the same master orchestrator, the two works could not be more different in tone or intent. Following the explosive polyrhythmic angularity of the vast first movement, the second, 'Mother of the Man', creates a lonely calm that verges on existential emptiness. A word of warning: in these desolate stretches, Sean Shibe may steal your heart with his guitar solo. The finale's title, 'Chain to the Rhythm', speaks for itself; perhaps only a composer who is also a virtuoso wind player could conceive such textures.

How wonderful to have these penetrating second interpretations of two exquisite works, captured in the most sensually luxurious sound. I'd be hard-pressed to name another recent release which affords greater aural pleasure or more significant nourishment, beginning to end.

Patrick Rucker

Absolute Jest – comparative version:

San Francisco SO, Tilson Thomas (9/15) (SFS) SFS0063

Naive and Sentimental Music – comparative version:

Los Angeles PO, Salonen (A/02) (NONE) 7559 79636-2

JS Bach

Violin Concertos^a – BWV1041; BWV1042.

Solo Violin Partita No 2, BWV1004

Daniel Lozakovich v71

^aChamber Orchestra of the Bavarian Radio

Symphony Orchestra / Radoslaw Szulc

DG (F) 479 9372GH (64' • DDD)



In many respects this is a quite exceptional programme. I love the way Daniel

Lozakovich marks every little harmonic twist and turn in the first movement of the E major Concerto, BWV1042 (ie from 2'12"), either with tiny changes of pace or modified tone colouring, and also his fragile vibrancy in the central *Adagio*. The finale has something of Heifetz's raw

energy but with more varied articulation, whereas the finale of the A minor, BWV1041, has the benefit of strongly arpeggiated playing, making for a maximum of contrast with the *Andante*, for example the deathly quiet entry at 4'21" or Lozakovich's rapt handling of the coda. Top rating among rival versions goes, in my view, to Frank Peter Zimmermann, whose conversational rapport with the Berlin Baroque Soloists is especially noteworthy in the outer movements (the ascetic principles of period performance are somewhat closer to hand) and who in the A minor produces a slimmer, less vibrant tone, his approach more stylised than that of Lozakovich but just as sensitively inflected. You could say that in terms of Baroque style, Lozakovich 'takes you back' whereas Zimmermann more observes the current status quo. I took to both when I first heard them and will happily add them to my own collection.

There is however a slight problem with Lozakovich's recording which will worry some readers more than others (it didn't worry me in the least), namely his very audible breathing – at its most conspicuous in the slow movement of the E major and just before the half-minute mark into the Second Partita's Sarabande. I mention this only because if I don't, someone is bound to complain; but if you accept Glenn Gould's humming (I've no problem there either) then rest assured that Lozakovich's breathing is a lot less intrusive than that and most noticeable on headphones.

The solo work is forcefully played, the Chaconne more variegated – rhythmically, tonally, in terms of articulation – as well as less stately than, say, the wonderful Julia Fischer, who similarly courts interpretative dignity while respectfully sidestepping the more radical aspects of received modern scholarship and its implications in performance terms. Zimmermann's CD couplings are the D minor Double Concerto and the violin version of the great D minor Keyboard Concerto, BWV1052, both of which are superb. In



Exquisite: the Royal Scottish National Orchestra and Peter Oundjian excel in the music of John Adams

closing I would cite Lozakovich as a major talent in the making; and if his next disc is as good as this one, there'll be much cause to celebrate. **Rob Cowan**

Violin Concertos – selected comparison:

FP Zimmermann, Berlin Baroque Sols

(4/18) (HANS) HC17046

Partita No 2 – selected comparison:

J Fischer (6/05) (PENT) PTC5186 072

Bartók · Kodály

Bartók Concerto for Orchestra, Sz116

Kodály Concerto for Orchestra

Berlin Radio Symphony Orchestra / Jakub Hrůša

Pentatone ⑆ PTC5186 626 (56' • DDD/DSD)



Here's a pairing rarely made on disc, yet they are natural partners: two

Concertos for Orchestra by Hungarian composers, each composed for American orchestras within five years of each other. Béla Bartók was chronically ill when he received a commission from the Koussevitzky Foundation. His cosmopolitan Concerto for Orchestra, premiered by the Boston Symphony in

1944, was a huge success, immediately taken into the repertoire. However, Zoltán Kodály's was the earlier composition but is rarely heard. It was commissioned for the Chicago Symphony's 50th anniversary and is more modest in scale – a single-movement work in five sections. The outbreak of the Second World War had prevented Kodály from travelling to Chicago; it was Bartók who took the score with him to the US as he headed into self-exile in 1940. The talented young Czech conductor Jakub Hrůša offers warm, affectionate performances with the Berlin Radio Symphony Orchestra.

Pentatone's booklet note declares that Kodály's Concerto for Orchestra 'cannot hold a candle to Bartók's eponymous work' but Hrůša does a fine job navigating the dialogue between solo groups and orchestra. Kodály treated the work almost as a concerto grosso, wanting to 'dress the concerto up in a Baroque costume'. This performance is as loving and playful as Antal Dorati's with his Philharmonia Hungarica on Decca and, although the acoustic is a little beefy, the Berlin strings display great warmth.

Bartók's work gives the Berlin players a more rigorous workout and they offer a

muscular reading. Hrůša allows plenty of time for the brooding introduction to unfold, although I miss the almost surgical incision of the LSO brass later in the opening movement. The 'Game of Pairs', where pairs of instruments thrust and parry in friendly duel, is a bit soft-focus here, neat and tidy, but lacking a touch of personality. The Elegia is atmospherically done, misty strings and nocturnal woodwinds beautifully balanced. Iván Fischer and the Budapest Festival Orchestra attack the finale with more vigour but Hrůša maintains scrupulous control over the Berlin strings' *perpetuum mobile*.

At just 55 minutes this is an ungenerous pairing; but although there's stronger competition when it comes to Bartók, this disc is worth hearing for its glowing account of the Kodály.

Mark Pullinger

Kodály – selected comparison:

Philh Hungarica, Dorati (9/74⁸) (DECC) 443 006-2DF2

Bartók – selected comparisons:

Chicago SO, Reiner (9/57⁶) (RCA) 82876 61390-2

LSO, Solti (3/83⁸) (DECC) 470 516-2DF2,

475 7711DOR or 478 4577GTC

Budapest Fest Orch, I Fischer (12/05⁸) (PHIL)

➤ 475 7684PB3 or ➤ 476 7255CC

Beethoven • Cramer • Clementi

Beethoven Piano (Violin) Concerto, Op 61a^a

Cramer Piano Sonata, 'Le retour à Londres',

Op 62 **Clementi** Piano Sonata, Op 40 No 2

Dejan Lazić *pf* **Netherlands Chamber**

Orchestra / Gordan Nikolitch

Onyx © ONYX4187 (78' • DDD)



Muzio Clementi and Johann Baptist (John) Cramer have much in common. Each

was considered a leading virtuoso, each composed teaching pieces still in use, each could claim Beethoven's admiration and friendship, and each became a successful music publisher and instrument manufacturer. Dejan Lazić has chosen two of their strongest sonatas. He throws himself into the Cramer E major's turbulent first-movement development section at full force, while his rapid-fire detached left-hand octaves in the *Allegretto* compensate for mincingly clipped phrasing elsewhere. Notice, too, how Lazić marks the finale's modulations by ever-so-slight yet noticeable adjustments in touch and timbre.

Lazić clearly relishes the desolate drama and clashing dissonances in the Clementi B minor Sonata's first movement, while bringing a wide palette of expressive inflections to the *Allegro* finale. Certainly he raises the music's emotional temperature in stark contrast to Howard Shelley's cooler, more classically contained interpretation.

At Clementi's request, Beethoven arranged his Violin Concerto for piano, expending minimal effort over the project. He basically left the orchestration intact, reproduced the solo violin part more or less verbatim on the piano, adding just enough left-hand accompaniment to keep the soloist from getting bored. Although Beethoven didn't provide cadenzas for the violinist, he left four options for the pianist, including a wild fantasia (heard here) where the piano and timpani duke it out. Lazić's sophisticated phrasing, unusual accents and strategic stresses throughout the long first movement often liberate the music from the bar lines. However, he saves his best long-lined legato eloquence for a beautifully sustained *Larghetto*. Under Gordan Nikolitch's leadership, the Netherlands Chamber Orchestra offer wind- and brass-dominated balances and well-characterised first-desk solo turns. Unfortunately their heavy-gaited Rondo finale lacks the

vitality, light-hearted thrust and finer ensemble calibration distinguishing Boris Berezovsky's collaboration with Thomas Dausgaard and the Swedish Chamber Orchestra, my current top choice. Buy this disc for the sonatas.

Jed Distler

Beethoven – selected comparison:

Berezovsky, Swedish CO, Dausgaard

(2/06) (SIMA) PSC1280

Clementi – selected comparison:

Shelley (11/10) (HYPE) CDA67819

Beethoven • Mendelssohn

Beethoven Piano Concerto No 4, Op 58

Mendelssohn Concerto for Violin, Piano and String Orchestra^a

Min-Jung Kym *pf* ^a**Zsolt-Tihámér Visontay** *vn*

Philharmonia Orchestra / Clemens Schuldt

Signum © SIGCD523 (73' • DDD)



There's no denying the precocity of this Double Concerto, written when

Mendelssohn was just 14. Yet for all its flashes of fledgling genius, the adolescent composer hadn't yet developed the ability to self-edit, and the music can often sound overwrought. Argerich and Kremer (DG, 9/89), balancing ferocity and charm, somehow manage to make every note meaningful, even in the protracted and voluble opening *Allegro*. Some performers cheat here – Lonquich, Weithaas and Camerata Bern (Claves, A/11), for example – charging through as if Mendelssohn had marked it *Allegro molto* and two beats to a bar instead of four.

Happily, the musicians on this Signum recording respect the letter of the score. Pianist Min-Jung Kym and violinist Zsolt-Tihámér Visontay meet the concerto's considerable technical demands with aplomb, although they occasionally get bogged down in its intricate, repetitive detail. They find firmer footing in the *recitativo* passage at 8'07", which they imbue with an improvisatory frisson. There's both tenderness and poise in the *Adagio*, and if conductor Clemens Schuldt's decision to pare the Philharmonia strings down to a solo group at 6'06" is an interpretative embellishment, at least it's true to the score's spirit. The finale dances with a graceful, playful ease that's worlds away from Argerich and Kremer's dizzying, dazzling breathlessness, but satisfies nonetheless.

Kym's Beethoven is considerably less persuasive. Slack rhythms make her leisurely tempo for the opening *Allegro*

moderato feel sleepy. And where's the sense of wonder in the various sudden shifts of key and colour? The *Andante*'s Orphic dialogue is eloquently dramatised but the Rondo is too strait-laced, despite some lovely, lyrical playing from soloist and orchestra near the end (from 7'32").

Andrew Farach-Colton

Bruckner

Symphony No 1 (Linz version, ed Nowak)

Munich Philharmonic Orchestra / Valery Gergiev

Münchner Philharmoniker © MPHIL0008

(51' • DDD)

Recorded live at the Stiftsbasilika St Florian, Linz, September 25, 2017

Bruckner

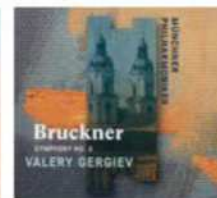
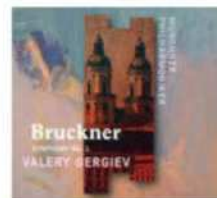
Symphony No 3 (1889 version, ed Nowak)

Munich Philharmonic Orchestra / Valery Gergiev

Münchner Philharmoniker © MPHIL0009

(55' • DDD)

Recorded live at the Stiftsbasilika St Florian, Linz, September 25, 2017



These new recordings in Gergiev's Bruckner series derive from a single concert given in the monastery of St Florian. When I reviewed the cycle's inaugural release of the Fourth Symphony (11/16), I observed that Gergiev's otherwise laudable interpretation was undermined by problems with the sound and production. This time around there are no issues with the recording quality but some other factors prevent these new releases from being fully recommendable.

In the case of the First Symphony, Gergiev's performance is for the most part direct and compelling, the faster movements underpinned by a propulsive bass line and sense of purpose that communicate a strong degree of excitement. The *Adagio* too is very fine, with luminous playing and a passionate climax. There's some occasionally fussy rubato in the first movement and dynamic contrasts are neglected at times, but these I can live with. More problematic, however, are the frequent rasping and puffing sounds made by the conductor, among the most conspicuous I've heard in a recording and especially distracting in the Scherzo. Largely for this reason, the newcomer offers no challenge to the superbly played and recorded version by Jaap van Zweden and the Netherlands Radio Philharmonic Orchestra.

The recording of the Third Symphony is blessedly free from the vocalisations that afflict the First Symphony but Gergiev's neglect of dynamic contrasts is more of an issue here, minimising the grandeur of climactic passages and robbing the symphony's quieter passages of a sense of repose. Gergiev also pays little heed to Bruckner's tempo markings in the early stages of the *Adagio* and pushes the pace to a rapid rate of knots later on in the movement. The effect is undeniably exciting on a moment-by-moment basis but comes at the expense of the movement's wider symphonic structure. The Trio of the Scherzo also features some arbitrary tempo manipulation for no obvious benefit.

There's no doubting Gergiev's grip on proceedings and the warmth and commitment of the playing, but what was most likely an involving experience heard live is less satisfactory as a recording. This is not always the case, of course, as demonstrated by RCA's recording of the magnificent performance given by Günter Wand with the NDR Symphony Orchestra in 1992. **Christian Hoskins**

Symphony No 1 – selected comparison:

Netherlands Rad PO, Zeweden (8/15) (CHAL) CC72566

Symphony No 3 – selected comparison:

NDR SO, Wand (RCA) 88985 43585-2

Dvořák

Symphony No 2, Op 4 B12.

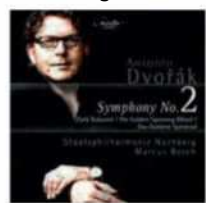
The Golden Spinning Wheel, Op 109 B197

Nuremberg State Philharmonic Orchestra /

Marcus Bosch

Coviello (F)  COV91735 (75' • DDD/DSD)

Recorded live at the Meistersingerhalle, Nuremberg, October 13, 2017



To complete their Dvořák symphony cycle, Marcus Bosch and the

Staatsphilharmonie Nürnberg turn their attention to the Second. In his early symphonies, Dvořák turned towards the 'New German' school of Wagner and Liszt and their influence can be felt here. Revised three times before its 1888 premiere, it lacks the Czech dance rhythms of the later symphonies and is all rather earnest and Wagnerian. And lengthy. Clocking in at over 50 minutes, like the First, it is inclined to ramble.

Boisterous horns early on signal Bosch's consistent approach to this cycle, driving the music along much faster than István Kertész (LSO) or José Serebrier (Bournemouth SO). Like them, Bosch observes the exposition repeat (Kubelík

cuts it), driving Dvořák's sturdy *Allegro con moto* along hard through its various modulations. Bosch does his best to limit the ponderous nature of the *Adagio*, keeping the wistful theme flowing, but it's not Dvořák's most memorable music. The third movement is most unlike a traditional scherzo, its mazurka theme lacking buoyancy. Even Bosch and the Staatsphilharmonie Nürnberg get bogged down here, needing an injection of Serebrier's energy in Bournemouth, but they rally for a rousing finale. The live recording suffers quite a tubby sound, where fine detail becomes blurred.

Unlike their recording of the First Symphony, which was presented alone (10/17), the Second on this disc is bolstered by *The Golden Spinning Wheel* to allow a generous playing time. Dvořák's symphonic poem is a particularly grisly one, telling the tale of Dornička, the king's intended bride, whose hands and feet are hacked off by her stepmother and stepsister. A magician brings her back to life and persuades the stepsister – who has taken her place as bride – to trade her feet for a golden spinning wheel, which reveals the truth to the king. It's the best music on the disc and Bosch draws sumptuous playing, the strings soaring gloriously. **Mark Pullinger**

Symphony No 2 – selected comparisons:

Bournemouth SO, Serebrier (2/14) (WARN) 2564 64527-6

LSO, Kertész (DECCA/LOND) 483 0744,

478 6459DC9 or 430 046-2DC6


BPO, Kubelík (DG) 463 158-2GB6

Eggert

Muzak³. Number Nine VII: Masse^b

^aMoritz Eggert voice Bavarian Radio Symphony

Orchestra / ^aDavid Robertson, ^bPeter Rundel

Neos (F)  NEOS11730 (60' • DDD/DSD)

Recorded live at the Herkulessaal der Residenz, Munich, ^aFebruary 5, ^aJune 4, 2016



Little has been heard in the UK by Moritz Eggert (b1965) during

those two decades since he came to prominence, but in Germany he has carved a niche in music-theatre with numerous operas, ballets and sundry projects to his name. This latest release features *Muzak* (2016), a discourse on the concept of music whose existence 'at the margins' has led to its permeating many aspects of society. Many pieces are either alluded to or evoked without being quoted literally over its 42 minutes, the likely intention being to underline the emotional resonance which such music can strike,

often almost involuntarily, in the mind of the unwitting listener.

The problem, as often with works of this nature, is that the musical substance is too insubstantial and generalised to convey the multilayered irony the composer doubtless intended. In this instance, Eggert provides the focal point with his almost continuous vocal presence, though his (self-penned) text is little more than a collection of titles and clichés from the pop canon, with his vocal delivery a mixture of coyness and bravado that irritates more than it intrigues.

Rather more engaging is *Masse* (2008), the seventh instalment in the 'Number Nine' series that Eggert has been assembling over the past two decades (Nos 1-3 can be heard as part of a worthwhile 'portrait' disc issued by Wergo), which considers the phenomenon of the Ninth in terms that encompass Austro-German symphonism as well as John Lennon's (in)famous tape collage. Musically it is predicated on all the instruments playing all of the time, though Eggert varies the texture so a wide range of incident is encountered over its eventful course.

Peter Rundel acquits himself admirably in this latter piece, as also does David Robertson in *Muzak* – yet another memorial tribute to David Bowie which promises more than it delivers.

Richard Whitehouse

Elgar

Symphony No 2, Op 63. Serenade, Op 20

BBC Symphony Orchestra / Edward Gardner

Chandos (F)  CHSA5197 (67' • DDD/DSD)



The opening movement of Elgar's Second Symphony has brought great diversity

of approach over the decades. How to interpret that tempo marking *Allegro vivace e nobilmente*? Exuberance, pace and nobility. Gardner steers the middle path between expansive Barbirolli (perhaps rather too expansive in his still-cherished later recording – EMI/Warner, 12/64) and propulsive Elgar. The 'spirit of delight' is there all right but so is a sense of sweeping expansiveness grandly endorsed in swelling horns. And when magic casements open on to the central section of the movement, Gardner really has us breathe in the heady, perfumed air of the nocturnal 'garden of delights' sequence – Elgar at his most extravagant and exotic.

So far so good. Gardner demonstrates an unerring sense of how the tricky transitions

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work in this piece and his appreciation of its harmonic delights is self-evident. And he has the seasoned instincts of the BBC Symphony Orchestra ensuring a naturalness and spontaneity through all the phrasing. So why the niggling feeling that something is missing: that last degree of heft, perhaps, a suggestion of unbridled passion driving the climaxes, a sense of being on the threshold of something much bigger?

Again there is beauty and grandeur in Elgar's heroic homage to King Edward VII and his dear friend Alfred E Rodewald (to say nothing of Beethoven's *Eroica*) in the great slow movement. The winding oboe counterpoint at the heart of it feels like a spontaneous embellishment of the grand processional progressing below it and in the wake of the final climax the extravagant falling glissandos in the violins do unquestionably carry an emotional charge, if not the hand-wringing intensity of a Barbirolli.

I wonder too if the striking Scherzo – played here with muscular vitality – might not have peaked a little more shockingly by pushing the tail end of the pounding percussion crescendo fractionally beyond our expectations (it does anyway peak later than we expect it to). That 'Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse' image carries a chilling prescience.

The finale is handsomely dispatched, its culmination a really splendid climax with Gardner ensuring that the horn counterpoint has thrilling prominence and that the big rhetorical phrases which follow set up a highly wrought return of the falling phrases of the *nobilmente* theme. They are, of course, the last hushed recollections of that most Wagnerian of Elgar codas. The Serenade for Strings is a lovely, understated bonus, the gorgeous slow movement blossoming at its heart without a trace of emotional excess.

If I don't sound entirely convinced by the symphony it has less to do with anything specific that Gardner does or does not deliver – I have the highest regard for him – but rather a feeling that further life experience will make it even better. Barbirolli and Barenboim (Decca, 7/14) have in spades the risk and temperament that longevity brings. **Edward Seckerson**

Górecki

Symphony No 3, 'Symphony of Sorrowful Songs', Op 36

Ewa Iżykowska *sop* Poznań Philharmonic Orchestra / Andrzej Boreyko
Dux © DUX1459 (55' • DDD)

Recorded live in the Concert Hall of the Poznań Philharmonic, February 4, 1995



My first, instinctive, impression of the first movement in this live recording –

made in 1995 – was that it was too fast. But the earthy yet precise sound of Górecki's monumental canon for strings gripped me almost immediately (I had never before considered how this work might sound on period instruments ...). Boreyko drives the music hard, certainly, but the last thing he does is skimp on detail. There is, in fact, a sculpted precision to the sound that I have not heard in any other recording. The tension before the entry of the solo soprano has you on the edge of your seat, and Ewa Iżykowska does not disappoint: she has that magnificent rich sound that only Polish sopranos seem to be able to muster, her sound only enhanced against the almost vibrato-free strings. I have never heard better than Stefania Woytowicz for Bour – she was the soloist at the first performance – but Iżykowska is her equal. Dawn Upshaw does not come close.

The orchestra's clarity of sound and precision of articulation also serves the opening of the second movement well, and not only is Iżykowska's lower register much darker than one would expect but her ascent to higher regions is of an extraordinary subtlety. Boreyko is masterly in sustaining the tension throughout the movement, right to the almost motionless final chords. In contrast to the first, the third movement initially seemed to me slightly too slow, but Boreyko knows exactly what he is doing – again, the tension never flags and the pacing is exactly right – and Iżykowska is simply superb, perfectly at one with the orchestra.

If you have not already guessed, I was in tears almost throughout the disc. Even if you have every other recording of this work in the catalogue, you should still buy this one. It is a masterly performance of a masterpiece. **Ivan Moody**

Selected comparisons:

Upshaw, London Sinfonietta, Zimman

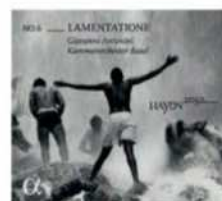
(4/93) (NONE) 7559 79282-2

Woytowicz, SWF SO, Bour (APEX) 0927 49821-2

Haydn

'Haydn 2032 - No 6, Lamentatione' Symphonies - No 3; No 26, 'Lamentatione'; No 30, 'Alleluia'; No 79

Basel Chamber Orchestra / Giovanni Antonini
Alpha © ALPHA678 (67' • DDD)



Giovanni Antonini's thematically grouped survey of Haydn's symphonies

continues with a pair of works from his *Sturm und Drang* period (the second half of the 1760s), along with works from either end of his long term of employment with Prince Nikolaus ('the Magnificent') Esterházy. The theme – 'Lamentatione' – and the plainchant links between the symphony of that name, No 26 in D minor, and the earlier *Alleluia* Symphony No 30 are clear to see. No 3 squeaks in on the merit of its slightly antique fugal finale, all 1'55" of it, which seems to have wondered in from the Op 20 Quartets. Symphony No 79, on the other hand, doesn't seem to fit the rubric at all – not that that's a reason not to include it; it does, after all, complete the final trio of Esterházy symphonies, along with Nos 80 and 81, which appeared on Antonini's previous volume (1/18).

There seems little need to rehearse again my admiration for the musicianship on show in this series. This is playing of a class that has often been denied Haydn, so frequently the victim of cynical rehearse/record schedules. The leisurely pace of the 'Haydn 2032' project allows the players to live with the music and make sure it falls truly under the fingers by the time they find themselves under the microphones. As one listens more, one realises the extent to which Antonini and his ensembles are 'in tune' with Haydn – even in his most neglected symphonies – to a greater extent than almost any other band. There's not only a fluency to the playing but a palpable joy in the corporate sound made by these musicians.

Lamentatione's agitation and *Alleluia's* celebration are characterised and played as finely as any other performances on record. The seriousness of intent behind No 3 lifts it from its status as simply 'early Haydn', granting it a dignity that rescues it from lazy accusations of primitiveness that often attend these works from the dawn of the Classical symphony. No 79 receives only its second period-instrument recording. Antonini captures the pure entertainment value of the work just as completely as Ottavio Dantone but there's a greater warmth here. As for that *Un poco allegro* that makes such an unexpected coda to the slow movement, Antonini is less *allegro*, more *un poco* – and very pleasing it is, too. **David Threasher**

Symphony No 79 – selected comparison:

Accademia Bizantina, Dantone

(3/16) (DECC) 478 8837DH2


C Lindberg

Viola Concerto, 'Steppenwolf'^a.

Peking Twilight. Tales of Galamanta

^aRafael Altino *va*

Odense Symphony Orchestra / Christian Lindberg

BIS (F)  BIS2308 (58' • DDD/DSD)



When not playing the trombone (as scintillatingly as anyone else on the planet) or championing Pettersson's symphonies from the podium, Christian Lindberg is also a composer of some distinction. Lindberg – who celebrates his 60th birthday this year – did not start composing in earnest until he was 39 and, while his initial works were all trombone-orientated, he quickly widened his instrumental range, producing several concertos, some of them recorded by BIS.

There is a vein of fun and irony in his music that makes individual works, and his output in general, disarming and appealing by turns. He rarely attempts the gravitas of, say, Pettersson or Anders Eliasson; rather, he has much in common with Aulis Sallinen in his way of mixing up styles and musics of very different provenance. This is evident in all three works here, though the balance in the Viola Concerto (2010-11), grippingly played here by Rafael Altino, leans a touch more to the serious, perhaps. The link with Hesse's *Steppenwolf* came late on in the compositional process but accords well with the music's atmosphere of isolation.


Drawn in part from his 'arte commedia' *Dawn of Galamanta*, *Tales of Galamanta* (2013-14) is a tone poem full of light and shade set in a town of Lindberg's own invention. *Peking Twilight* (2012) was written for the centenary of the Norrköping Symphony Orchestra, with whom Lindberg has so brilliantly recorded Pettersson. A kaleidoscopically varied tone poem, the seeming orientalisms stem from Norrköping's local nickname of, yes, Peking. BIS's terrifically clear sound captures these works, sparkingly performed in Odense, in all their appealing whimsy. **Guy Rickards**

Mahler

Symphony No 4

Julia Kleiter *sop*

Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra / Daniele Gatti

RCO Live (F)  RCO18004 (58' • DDD/DSD • T/t)

Recorded live, November 8 & 9, 2017



After his disappointingly urbane account of the *Resurrection*

Symphony, the twilight, childlike world of the Fourth would, on paper, seem far better suited to the cultured Royal Concertgebouw sound as favoured and actively encouraged by Daniele Gatti. I say actively encouraged because this is an orchestra for whom the edgy and ugly sonority does not come naturally, whose default sound is rich and homogeneous. Mahler needs his caustic colours, his rough and ready reediness, and Gatti seems reluctant to sacrifice the inherent beauty of the orchestra to that end.

It's interesting that in the booklet interview he is plainly aware of the symphony's more ominous side, its darker, starker colours. Indeed in theory he almost certainly asks just that of his orchestra. It's just that we really don't hear it in practice. This performance of the Fourth delivers all kinds of gorgeousness. The elegantly turned first movement is warm and rosy, an object lesson in the immaculate use of tempo-rubato. All those excitable quickenings of pulse so beloved of Mahler are effortlessly – perhaps too effortlessly – dispatched. And truth to tell, that childish 'raucousness', so essential to the character of the music, doesn't really register. The 'edge' on the sound (particularly in the woodwinds) is pretty much absent, even *in extremis*. Compare the recent Adám Fischer account with the Düsseldorf Symphony. Chalk and cheese.

And so even the ill-tuned grim reaper of a fiddler in the second movement sounds almost apologetic that he's a whole tone sharp. The rusticity and coarse inelegance of this, another of Mahler's dances of death, is muted, the sound palette respectfully rounded and 'covered' in effect. Especially those *fortissimo* winds.

Of course, the ravishing Trio section is just that, swathed in portamento, and it's as if that downy comforter gently prepares for the very beautiful, very expansive, reading of the slow movement. It is extravagantly slow – again in marked contrast to the revelations thrown up in Adám Fischer's recent account – but Gatti certainly conveys how acutely the vision becomes distracted at the heart of the movement. He is nothing if not intense. And yet you want the sound to lose something of its bloom in keeping with the increasing anxiety projected in the music. But then comes the 'Heaven's Gate' moment and

Mahler's benediction of a coda, where Gatti coaxes a flawless violin glissando into the closing measures that is something else.

And so to 'Das himmlische Leben', the flip-side of life on earth, and Gatti's 'Angel' – Julia Kleiter – is done no favours at all by her somewhat recessed balance in the soundscape. Her singing, her sound, is lovely but the words sound occluded from where we are seated – more consonants are needed. I just wanted to be drawn more into her confidence – literally. I like Gatti's almost cartoonish sprint through those manic orchestral interjections – it's a vivid reminder of his conductor's imagination. But beautiful though much of this is, it isn't the whole picture for Mahler's Fourth. Adám Fischer – in the most interesting account of the piece I've heard in years – gets us a whole lot closer to that.

Edward Seckerson

Selected comparison:

Müller, Düsseldorf SO, A Fischer

(1/18) (AVI) AVI8553378

Martinů

Concerto for Two Violins, H329^a.

Rhapsody-Concerto, H337^b.


Concerto for Two Pianos, H292^c

^aDeborah Nemtanu, ^aSarah Nemtanu *vns*

^bMagali Demesse *va* ^cMomo Kodama,

^cMari Kodama *pfs* Marseille Philharmonic

Orchestra / Lawrence Foster

Pentatone (F)  PTC5186 658 (63' • DDD/DSD)



Here we have Martinů's piano and violin double concertos

performed by two pairs of sisters, which is less gimmicky than it might initially sound when you remember that the Labèque have the Concerto for Two Pianos in their repertory (albeit not, to my knowledge, in their discography), and that the Concerto for Two Violins was commissioned by violinist twins Gerald and Wilfred Beal.

The latter work is played with bags of charm and considerable flamboyance by the Franco-Romanian Nemtanus, Deborah and Sarah, sweet if a bit lightweight in tone, exactly precise in all those exposed bravura passages in parallel harmonies, and relishing the neo-Baroque flourishes with which Martinů peppers the score. There's dash and verve in the opening movement, a slightly barbed elegance in the *Moderato*, where they vie with each other for the principal melody, and real exhilaration in the final sprint for home. Above all, they sound as if they're really enjoying themselves with it.



Anna Lucia Richter (right) and Barbara Kozelj join Iván Fischer and the Budapest Festival Orchestra in Mendelssohn's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*

It's an immensely persuasive performance, as is Momo and Mari Kodama's angry, hard-hitting account of the Concerto for Two Pianos, written in 1943 as an expression of Martinů's anxieties at the Nazi occupation of Czechoslovakia. The ferocity of the opening pins you to your seat, though the close placing of the pianos and the sheer weight of the Kodamas' sound means we lose too much orchestral detail in the process. Their technical prowess, throughout, proves exceptional, though the emotional trajectory is unflinchingly conveyed, with the confrontational fury of the first movement giving way to the gaunt exchanges of the *Adagio* and a tentative but genuine optimism in the finale.

The double concertos are separated by the reflective *Rhapsody-Concerto* for viola, which Pentatone has rather unfairly treated as a filler by excluding viola player Magali Demesse from the cover photograph and placing her name in small print down-page. This is, however, another strong performance, notable both for the quiet sincerity and understated nobility of Demesse's interpretation and for some beautiful playing from the Marseille Philharmonic under Lawrence Foster. Fine throughout, they come very much

into their own here. Dark woodwind and brass add immeasurably to the sombre mood and the strings, warm and vibrant, are excellent, both in the majestic opening statement and in the slowly shifting chords that track the nostalgic viola melody that comes to dominate the second movement before bringing the work to its serene close. **Tim Ashley**

F & F Mendelssohn

Felix Mendelssohn *A Midsummer Night's Dream*^a - Overture, Op 21; Incidental Music, Op 61 (excs) **Fanny Mendelssohn** Gondellied, Op 1 No 6^b. Sechs Lieder, Op 9^b - No 2, Ferne; No 6, Die Mainacht

^{ab}Anna Lucia Richter *sop* ^aBarbara Kozelj *contr*

^aPro Musica Women's Choir, Nyíregyháza; Budapest Festival Orchestra / Iván Fischer

Channel Classics (C)  CCSSA37418

(57' • DDD/DSD • T/T)



'Humans like this music. It entertains them', Iván Fischer writes, with quizzical humour, in a booklet note for his recording of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. 'However,' he adds, 'we made this recording for fairies.

They listen differently.' The work is, of course, by no means entirely about fairy music, extraordinary though it is, and one of the delights of this performance is that it manages to blend the magical with the human in equal measure. Whether we find ourselves 'listening differently' or otherwise, there's a freshness and energy in both conducting and playing that for the most part genuinely enchants.

Fischer's ear for detail is, as one might expect, marvellously acute. The orchestral sound is ravishing, with plenty of delicacy and refinement in the gossamer textures of the Overture, and a burnished warmth in the Nocturne, where the Budapest horns sound particularly beautiful. But we're also aware of a fiercely dramatic sensibility at work throughout. A flash of menace intrudes on the quicksilver precision of the Scherzo, and there's real turbulence in the Intermezzo for the bewildered mortals trapped in Oberon's wood. The melodramas are omitted, meanwhile, and the vocal numbers performed in German rather than English. The singing is good rather than great; and in a recording that is otherwise well nigh perfectly engineered, the balance comes slightly adrift in 'Bunte Schlangen, zweigezüngt' ('You spotted snakes with double tongue'), where the

soloists, Anna Lucia Richter (clean and clear) and Barbara Kozelj (a bit plummy), are placed fractionally too far forwards and the choir too far back.

Richter is again the soloist in the group of songs by Fanny Mendelssohn that form the filler. The simple yet effective orchestrations are by Sándor Balogh, one of the orchestra's trombonists, as well as a composer in his own right: his name has seemingly been omitted in error from the booklet accompanying the disc's initial pressing but has, I gather, been restored for later issues. He turns 'Die Mainacht' into a slow waltz with an attractive oboe obbligato, while rippling flute arpeggios propel the lovers of 'Gondellied' across the Venetian lagoon. Richter could perhaps do a bit more more with the words but sings with a pure, crystalline tone and a fine sense of line. **Tim Ashley**

Młynarski · Penderecki · Weinberg

'Polish Music'

Młynarski Symphony, 'Polonia', Op 14

Penderecki Polonaise **Weinberg** Polish Melodies, Op 47 No 2

Warsaw Philharmonic Orchestra / Jacek Kaspszyk
Warner Classics © 19029 56997-8 (63' • DDD)



It is over 10 years since I first encountered Emil Młynarski's music, with his

marvellous Second Violin Concerto played by Nigel Kennedy (EMI/Warner, 11/07). Since then, not much has been added to his discography but once again it is Jacek Kaspszyk, the conductor for Kennedy, who directs the Warsaw Philharmonic Orchestra in his F minor Symphony, *Polonia* (1910). Playing for a full 40 minutes, the symphony dominates the disc.

Młynarski (1870-1935) was a composition pupil of Rimsky-Korsakov and it shows, most particularly in the sparkling *Presto scherzo* which, in the composer's programme, symbolises hope for Poland's release from partition and foreign domination, eloquently depicted in the preceding *Adagio*. Poland's past and hopes for the future are the themes of the outer movements, the music shot through with the flavour and rhythms of Polish dances, such as the oberek and cracovienne. Written in a late-Romantic style, this is an attractive score, played with compelling fervour.

The couplings are lighter but no less nationalistic in tone. Penderecki's 2015

Polonaise is not so much a setting of the dance as a tone poem on the idea of it. An appealing concert-opener, I doubt anyone listening with an innocent ear would guess Penderecki as its creator. Weinberg's *Polish Melodies* (1950) are more individual, written at a time of personal danger having fallen foul of the Soviet regime. The orchestration in the first dance reminded me a little of Nielsen, curiously; elsewhere there are touches of Shostakovich (in lighter, raucous vein). The four dances make an endearing and appealing set that at times looks into the abyss but turns away. Excellent performances, fine sound. **Guy Rickards**

Mozart · Mysliveček

Mozart Flute Concertos - No 1, K313; No 2, K314

Mysliveček Flute Concerto

English Chamber Orchestra / Ana de la Vega fl

Pentatone © PTC5186 723 (63' • DDD/DSD)



For all his protestations about how he detested the flute, Mozart

nevertheless gave flautists two of the founding works of their concert repertoire – even if one is a knock-off from his sole oboe concerto. Ana de la Vega becomes the latest to record them; a flautist now based in north Germany but born in Australia to British and Argentinian parents and who studied in France before becoming principal flute of the Norte Symphony Orchestra in Portugal.

She is a charming, persuasive advocate for these two indelible works. The English Chamber Orchestra, too, offer fine support and, with a range of tone colours (the muted central movement of the G major First Concerto is a particular highlight) match de la Vega's recreative imagination. Pentatone has played its part as well, capturing these performances (Henry Wood Hall in London) in particularly clear sound, without letting it become too analytical. Compare this with the far more generous EMI acoustic for Emmanuel Pahud's recording of the two Mozart concertos and de la Vega perhaps comes off best, even with her more audible snatches of breath between phrases.

De la Vega sells these two works as comprehensively as Pahud, even if, as so often, his articulation and rhythmic point remains unmatched. His coupling is the Concerto for flute and harp, understandably enough; de la Vega goes one better and offers the first recording of a Concerto in D by Josef Mysliveček,

a profound influence on Mozart. As with his violin concertos, which I reviewed in the July issue (Accent), this work is one that displays the utmost craftsmanship and appeal but which nevertheless relies on a fine performance to render it memorable. Ana de la Vega gives it just that.

David Thresher

Mozart – selected comparison:

Pahud, BPO, Abbado

(7/97th) (EMI/WARN) 965937-2 or 085195-2

Mozart

Piano Concertos - No 7 for Three Pianos, K242^a; No 10 for Two Pianos, K365^b; No 20, K466^c; No 21, K467^c. Sonata for Two Pianos, K448^d.

Fantasia, K396

Valerie Tryon, ^{ab}Peter Donohoe, ^aMishka Rushdie

Momen pfs ^{abc}Royal Philharmonic Orchestra /

^{ab}Boris Brott, ^cJac van Steen

Somm © ② SOMMCD268-2 (149' • DDD)



It's good to be reminded just how much fun Mozart's works involving

multiple pianos are. The concertos for two and three keyboards don't come out much, mainly due to the logistics of shifting extra Steinways into the orchestra hall. They both date from the mid-1770s, so they're lighter works than the miraculous run of Viennese concertos from the following decade, but they're no less demanding for the pianists and full of wonderful, witty things. The pianos here are ideally separated in the sound picture, so you can hear exactly who's doing what, and a splendid time is audibly had by all, both in the concertos (Tryon with Donohoe plus Rushdie Momen for K242) and in the D major Sonata, K448 (Tryon and Donohoe).

The ubiquitous pairing of the adjacent D minor and C major solo concertos demonstrates, as Michael Quinn's comprehensive booklet notes remind us, the evolution of Mozart's understanding of the piano and its capabilities. Anyone discovering them here for the first time is unlikely to be disappointed. Tryon's pianism is faultless (she's spotlit a touch in the sound picture) and the woodwind solos are ideally mellifluous. What's lacking is the sense of discovery: these are, after all, among the works that redefined the expressive parameters of the keyboard concerto. Everything is in the right place but the sense of living on the edge in the D minor Concerto (and in the C minor Fantasia) is sadly missing and the C major Concerto comes over as merely polite,

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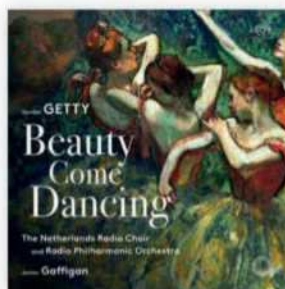
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notwithstanding a beautifully moulded slow movement. Nevertheless, the disc is worthwhile for the multi-piano works.

David Thresher

Nielsen

Symphonies – No 3, 'Sinfonia espansiva', Op 27^a;

No 4, 'The Inextinguishable', Op 29^b

^aEstelí Gomez *sop* ^aJohn Taylor Ward *bar*

Seattle Symphony Orchestra / Thomas Dausgaard

Seattle Symphony Media © SSM1017 (71' • DDD)

Recorded live at the S Mark Taper Auditorium,

Benaroya Hall, Seattle, ^aNovember 12 & 14, 2015;

^aJune 8-10, 2017



This is the only symphonic Nielsen we have had on record from Thomas

Dausgaard since his 2012 DVD release of the *Sinfonia espansiva* with the Danish National Symphony Orchestra. This performance from Seattle – where the Dane takes over as Music Director next year after five seasons as Principal Guest Conductor – presents no real departures from that account but gives us a fatter orchestral sound that doesn't immediately lend itself to Nielsen's brittle, direct aesthetic.

Dausgaard taps the Third Symphony's origins in song and dance excitingly but, at the apex of the first movement, we don't hear adequate grind as that rural rocking triad clashes directly with the urbane waltz that suddenly carves its way into the argument (nor the thrillingly alarmist woodwind trills it prompts). Estelí Gomez, with an attractive voice, sounds a little shaky in Nielsen's *Andante*. The treacherously difficult pacing of the finale – 'the easy stride of a farmer on his own land' for one contemporary critic – is bang-on, an exact match for Dausgaard's Copenhagen performance.

Imbalance can sometimes frustrate in Dausgaard's *Inextinguishable* too, with a touch of breathlessness thrown in. The inner conflicts of the third movement come off rather better than those of the first and fourth; the latter is just a little too low-octane, its primeval horn calls – moments of intense release – recessed in a sound picture that could have used more immediacy given the fissile nature of the score.

Dausgaard finds a rare sense of rapture in the *Poco adagio* and the way he makes the symphony's final chord resonate through to its end point (followed, as in the Third, by applause) is stylish indeed. As it is, Schönwandt and Oramo offer more on

their recordings of both symphonies, as does Chung in the Third, though that might say more about an orchestra and engineering team on unfamiliar territory than about Dausgaard's own Nielsen credentials. **Andrew Mellor**

Symphonies Nos 3 & 4 – selected comparisons:

Danish Nat SO, Schönwandt

(12/99^R, 9/00^R) (NAXO) 8 570738, 8 570739 (*oas*)

Royal Stockholm PO, Oramo

(5/14, 3/15) (BIS) BIS2028, BIS2048 (*oas*)

Symphony No 3 – selected comparison:

Gothenburg SO, Chung

(BIS) BIS-CD321 or BIS-CD614/16

Porra

Domino Suite^a. Entropia^b. Kohta^c.

Kohta (instrumental version)

^aPaperi T *voc* ^bLauri Porra *elec bass*

^aAki Rissanen *pf* ^aJoonas Riippa *drum kit*

Lahti Symphony Orchestra / Jaakko Kuusisto

BIS © BIS2305 (83' • DDD/DSD)



Lauri Porra (*b*1977) is a Finnish composer and electric bass player. His musical

credentials are impeccable: Sibelius was his great-grandfather, Jussi Jalas his grandfather, with musicians for both parents, his father (as an amateur) in jazz. Porra's own musical instincts have drawn him towards rock and other musics, for which he has rightly been lauded. In *Kohta* (2016), he plays an omniwerk, an instrument created in 2014 as (in Porra's description) 'a sort of combination of ... the Lautenwerk (lute-harpsichord) and the viola organista ... a bowed instrument played by pressing keys'.

The three works included here, *Kohta* presented in two alternative versions, are testimony to Porra's musical instincts and collegiate approach. Vili Ollila assisted with all the orchestrations, Jaakko Kuusisto assisting with *Entropia*, a concerto for electric bass and orchestra (2015) and *Domino Suite*, a duo concertante with jazz drums and piano orchestra (2017). Percussionist Samuli Kosminen also assisted technically throughout with various sound effects in post-production: this is an unashamedly manufactured product.

Yet with all this care and thought lavished, I wish I could be enthusiastic about the result. Alas, below the surface slickness, the music strikes me as aimless, self-indulgent and devoid of any striking personality. *Entropia* comes off best, Porra writing for his own instrument, but long outstays its near-28-minute duration. *Kohta* ('Paragraph' is one possible translation;

'Point' and 'Soon' are others) originated as a piece for rapper and orchestra; but, as the firm-toned Paperi T (aka Henri Pulkkanen) intones in Finnish only and the text is untranslated, its expressive target remains obscure. I prefer the instrumental version but it is just too long. The less said about *Domino Suite* the better, frankly. **Guy Rickards**

Rheinberger · Scholz

'The Romantic Piano Concerto, Vol 76'

Rheinberger Piano Concerto, Op 94 Scholz

Piano Concerto, Op 57. Capriccio, Op 35

Simon Callaghan *pf*

BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra / Ben Gernon

Hyperion © CDA68225 (71' • DDD)



I first made the acquaintance of Rheinberger, born six years after

Brahms, through his organ sonatas, and it is in that capacity that he's arguably best known. We've now reached Vol 76 in Hyperion's 'Romantic Piano Concerto' and it's a series that continues to surprise and delight. Simon Callaghan (who made such a good job of the concertos by the splendidly named Roger Sacheverell Coke in Vol 73 – 11/17) is undaunted by the demands – technical and musical – confronting him during the course of the disc.

Brahms may have dreaded composing in the shadow of Beethoven but spare a thought for those who composed in the shadow of Brahms. The Rheinberger Concerto sets off in a mood of confident pomp, its chest metaphorically puffed out, and Callaghan has the technical wherewithal to encompass all its challenges – from big chordal textures to glistening passagework – while the supremely gifted Ben Gernon coaxes terrifically colourful playing from the BBC Scottish SO. If it's not exactly a work abounding in hummable tunes, there's a strong sense of structure and development (particularly in the first movement), and plenty of opportunities for the piano to duet with members of the orchestra. Rheinberger's ear for orchestration really comes into its own in the slow movement (which lives up to its *Patetico* heading) – sample the woodwind interjections from 4'07" of track 2. It breathes the same air as Brahms without being cowed by the comparison. The finale is also beautifully judged, from the striking chordal opening to the unhurried dialogue that unfolds between soloist and orchestra, which gets sidetracked by more



Nielsen in Seattle: Thomas Dausgaard conducts the Third and Fourth Symphonies of his compatriot

skittish writing, to delightful effect. Though we owe a debt to Michael Ponti for making this work's first recording, it pales in comparison with the new one, especially where the orchestra is concerned.

The remainder of the disc is, frankly, less ear-catching, though that's certainly not the fault of the performers. Both works here are recording premieres: Scholz's *Capriccio* is a harmless makeweight, while the B major Concerto sets off with galumphing rhythms reminiscent of Schumann, though there's an overdependence here on decorative effect. The second movement is built around a Brahmsian-style consoling melody but it's a pale imitation of the real thing. The most effective movement is the finale, which is suitably sprightly and, like everything else here, most engaging played. **Harriet Smith**

Rheinberger – selected comparison:

Ponti, *Deutsches SO Berlin, Schmidt-Gertenbach*
(5/93^R) (BRIL) 95300

R Strauss

Don Juan, Op 20. Festmarsch. Macbeth, Op 23.

Tod und Verklärung, Op 24

Staatskapelle Weimar / Kirill Karabits

Audite © AUDITE97 755 (71' • DDD)



Though one of Germany's oldest orchestras, the Staatskapelle

Weimar has never been a major presence on disc. Just over a decade ago, though, Naxos released the first of a trio of well-received discs of them playing Strauss, an *Alpensinfonie* (9/06) that was followed by a *Four Last Songs* (5/08) and *Sinfonia domestica* (1/10). This orchestra, where Strauss himself had laid the foundations of his conducting career in the 1890s, revealed itself to be a force to be reckoned with in the composer's works.

This fact is underlined in this fine new recording under Kirill Karabits, who has been juggling his job as music director in Weimar with his post at the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra since 2016. It's an interesting programme, too, offering the early (though subsequently revised) *Macbeth*, plus two scores that brought breakthroughs in their different ways: *Don Juan* and *Tod und Verklärung*. The occasional *Festmarsch* makes a welcome filler.

The virtues familiar from those earlier discs are apparent here in an orchestral sound that is rich and vibrant, with lively strings, rounded, warm brass and characterful woodwind – and Audite captures the sound most satisfyingly at the Weimarahalle. Karabits shows himself to be a very respectable Straussian, too, offering a beautifully paced, brawny and broody reading of *Macbeth*. It's a performance that's powerfully driven and characterised by impressive sweep and biting conviction; though it's certainly not rushed, and the conductor takes plenty of time for that yearning climax that marks the score's halfway point (at around 10'10" here).

Don Juan is hugely enjoyable, with plenty of sensuality (listen to that first romantic episode around three minutes in, with the harp nicely audible) and bristling élan – the strings really dig in to their tremolandos accompanying the final return of the big horn theme (at 14'27"), for example. Karabits turns in a rousing account of *Tod und Verklärung*, too, although for me it doesn't quite match the warmth and lyricism of Sebastian Weigle's terrific recent Frankfurt account (Oehms, 2/18). The *Festmarsch* is not a piece to return to often, perhaps, but it's rousing presented here in a rare outing on disc.



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Peter Whelan bassoon
Anneke Scott, Jocelyn Lightfoot horns
Vladimir Waltham cello

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AV 2387

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The Brook Street Band
Rachel Harris violin
Tatty Theo cello
Caroline Gibley harpsichord

The Brook Street Band's passion for the music of George Frideric Handel shines through on this recording of all of the Violin Sonatas by – or attributed to – the Baroque composer. Posing the question 'how many violin sonatas did Handel actually compose?', the Band offers nine works composed over a span of 40 years, from the German-born Handel's early years honing his style in Italy to his later years as a leading light in London.



AV 2389

Chopin: Cello Sonata in G minor, Op. 65

Schumann: Fantasiestücke, Op. 73
Grieg: Cello Sonata in A minor, Op. 36

Inbal Segev cello
Juho Pohjonen piano

American-Israeli cellist Inbal Segev's debut release for AVIE features the lush and romantic sonatas by Chopin and Grieg, and three Fantasiestücke by Robert Schumann. She is joined by Finnish pianist Juho Pohjonen, a fitting partner for the pianistic Chopin and the virtuosic Grieg. In Schumann's own transcription of his 'Fantasy Pieces', originally for clarinet, the lyrical quality shines through on Inbal's 1673 Ruggieri cello.



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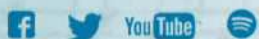
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So what are the drawbacks? For all the disc's enjoyability, one notices that that Weimar orchestra doesn't always command the same sharpness and clarity of some of its more glamorous German competitors, with some details occasionally getting lost. But there's still an enormous amount to like in these vivid, committed performances. **Hugo Shirley**

Tarp

'Orchestral Works, Vol 1'

The Dethroned Animal Tamer, Op 38 - Suite.
Concertino for Flute and Orchestra, Op 30^a.
Overture to a Comedy No 1, Op 36. Concertino
for Violin and Orchestra, Op 13^b. Suite on Old
Danish Folk Songs

^aLena Kildahl // ^bStanislav Pronin *vn*

Aarhus Symphony Orchestra / Tobias Ringborg
Dacapo (F) 6 220668 (55' • DDD/DSD)



Svend Erik Tarp was a contemporary of Vagn Holmboe and Herman D Koppel,

the generation of Danish composers who came in between the likes of Riisager and Nørgård. The parallels with Riisager are obvious: Tarp spent much of his adult life working as an administrator and when it came to composition he was similarly interested in neoclassical elegance and translucence.

At the time of his Concertino for violin and orchestra (1932) Tarp was yet to fully embrace his Stravinskian principles but the fertile discipline of its slow movement, the most engaging of the three, proves that he moved in the right direction. Claus Røllum-Larsen's detailed booklet note draws attention to the elements of New Objectivity in the work and its hesitant Romanticism speaks of a composer finding his way, though Stanislav Pronin's performance goes all in. In the Concertino for flute and orchestra of five years later elegance takes pride of place even over mechanics. It is an attractive, assured piece, played with delicacy by the orchestra's principal flute, Lena Kildahl.

Tarp's *Suite on Old Danish Folk Songs* came in between the two and is even more revealing. We hear a composer trying to break free of the constraints of Nordic Romanticism and glancing in some fascinating Impressionistic directions as a result. There is plenty to listen to, again and again, in these four pieces but you can hear why the ballet suite *The Dethroned Animal Tamer* has been placed first on this disc. There is canny pastiche, dramatic clarity and theatrical colour in this 1942

work but more than anything there is a directness that is wholly Danish (as is each movement's insistence on not outstaying its welcome). The Aarhus Symphony Orchestra play it with exuberance. A typically classy product from this label with bespoke artwork, born of the music, by Denise Burt. The booklet even whets the appetite with the contents of the next two instalments. **Andrew Mellor**

Vaughan Williams

Oboe Concerto^a. Piano Concerto^b.
Flos campi^c. Serenade to Music^d

^aCarla Huhtanen *sop* ^dEmily D'Angelo *mez*

^aLawrence Willford *ten* ^dTyler Duncan *bar*

^aSarah Jeffrey *ob* ^cTeng Li *va* ^bLouis Lortie *pf*

^cElmer Iseler Singers; Toronto Symphony

Orchestra / Peter Oundjian

Chandos (F) CHSA5201 (82' • DDD/DSD • T/t)



I was very much taken with Peter Oundjian's live pairing of Vaughan Williams's

Fourth and Fifth symphonies (5/12), and the present meticulously prepared and generously full Chandos anthology (which marks the end of his 14-year tenure at the helm of the Toronto SO) again has lots to commend it.

In the arresting (and still underrated) Piano Concerto, Oundjian forms a splendidly combustible alliance with Louis Lortie, who proves as commandingly articulate and powerfully imaginative a proponent as any I have yet encountered. Not only does the big-boned solo writing hold absolutely no terrors for him, the experienced French-Canadian virtuoso locates every ounce of crepuscular mystery from the slow movement and ravishingly soft epilogue. Rest assured, Oundjian and his admirably spruce Toronto band are with him every step of the way, and it all adds up to yet another distinguished addition to this craggy utterance's select discography to set alongside those versions from Howard Shelley (Chandos, 7/91, and Lyrita, 3/93), Piers Lane (CfP, 11/95) and Ashley Wass (Naxos, 12/09). Oundjian also presides over a deeply sympathetic rendering of *Flos campi*, that sensuous and exotic paean to earthly love (and, like the Piano Concerto, one of RVW's most questing and sheerly personal utterances). Boasting top-notch contributions from the TSO's principal viola, Teng Li, and the Elmer Iseler Singers, it's an uncommonly lucid, entrancingly detailed performance to have you marvelling afresh at this music's

intoxicating beauty, soaring poetry and bracingly adventurous harmonic scope.

As for the remaining items, both the Oboe Concerto and *Serenade to Music* enjoy supremely mellifluous treatment, but in the former I do crave rather more in the way of tumbling fantasy and freewheeling spontaneity – qualities that Nicholas Daniel for one displays so abundantly in his memorable collaboration with the Britten Sinfonia (Harmonia Mundi, 5/15). Similarly, Oundjian's conception of RVW's sublime tribute to Henry Wood strikes me as just a little too somnolent and wanting something in rapt wonder. It's given in the alternative arrangement sanctioned by the ever-practical composer featuring orchestra, chorus and four instead of 16 soloists (here soprano, mezzo, tenor and baritone) – an option that always leaves me hankering for an authentic bass voice at 'The motions of his spirit are dull as night, / And his affections dark as Erebus' (beam to 9'25"). No matter, such is the calibre of the music-making elsewhere, aficionados should, I think, try and hear this ripely engineered anthology for themselves. **Andrew Achenbach**

Vivaldi

String Concertos – RV109; RV117; RV118; RV126; RV138; RV142; RV145; RV152; RV155; RV161; 'Conca', RV163; RV165; RV167. Viola d'amore Concertos^a – RV393; RV394; RV396; RV397

^aAlessandro Tampieri *va d'amore*

Accademia Bizantina / Ottavio Dantone

Naïve (M) 2 OP30570 (115' • DDD)



Happily for Vivaldi lovers, the long-stalled Naïve Edition is now back on track,

complete with those chic cover portraits mingling haute couture and postmodernist camp. A bundle of hyperactivity, the Red Priest famously proclaimed that he could write a concerto faster than it took his copyists to copy it. Some of the tiny concertos for string orchestra, most lasting under five minutes, seem to prove his point. Yet even when the basic invention – laconic repeated phrases, predictable chains of sequences – is formulaic, Vivaldi's trademark incendiary energy carries the day. There is also more variety than you might suspect. Finales range from the scampering bourrée in the D major Concerto, RV126, to the exhilarating triple fugue in RV152. Slow movements are rarely straightforwardly songful. The chromatic haze in the haunting *Largos* of RV161 and RV142 evokes the mysterious melancholy of the

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^aJuliane Banse sop ⁿAlice Coote mez ^lThomas Zehetmair vn ^hBoris Bloch pf ^qPeter Solomon org ^hEngadin Kantorei; ^hKüsnacht Chamber Choir; ⁿZurich Sing-Akademie; Zurich Tonhalle Orchestra / ^lGerd Albrecht, ⁱVolkmar Andreae, ^gHerbert Blomstedt, ^dLionel Bringuier, ^bFrans Brüggen, ^mSylvain Cambreling, ^qCharles Dutoit, ^hChristoph Eschenbach, ^eBernard Haitink, ^lHeinz Holliger, ^rRudolf Kempe, ^uLorin Maazel, ^kJonathan Nott, ^oHans Rosbaud, ^sEsa-Pekka Salonen, ^tErich Schmid, ^vOthmar Schoeck, ^aMarkus Stenz, ^pPierre-André Valade, ^pHiroshi Wakasugi, ⁿDavid Zinman

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Recorded live ⁱ1942, ^s1943, ^q1958, ^r1959, ^l1968, ^h1985, ^p1986, ^v1991, ^b1997, ^l2001, ^o2002, ^e2009, ^d2014, ^m2015, ^a2016



This modern history in sound of the Tonhalle begins in

December 1942. On the podium is Volkmar Andreae, leading an urgent and sweetly songful Bruckner Seventh that's consistent with his Vienna Symphony recording from a decade later, though also slightly compromised by unreliable brass intonation and a low hum at soft dynamics.

The narrative focus is established from the outset, presenting well-known combinations of artists and repertoire in duplications of commercially available accounts – but caught in concert, with all the attendant pros and cons. Musicians don't always take more risks live than in the studio; sometimes they may fall back on a more limited vocabulary of larger, broader gestures designed to project to the back of the hall. More recent Bruckner evenings –

the Fifth with Bernard Haitink (2009) and the Ninth with Herbert Blomstedt (2014) – were doubtless red-letter days for the Tonhalle but they add little to already exhaustively documented interpretations.

Native music and musicians form an important subplot. A Bergian Fourth Symphony by Albert Moeschinger is conducted by Hans Rosbaud on disc 2; Schubert's Third and Schumann's Fourth are reinvented by Erich Schmid and Othmar Schoeck with the improvisatory freedom of true composer-conductors. From 1985, Schoeck's *Penthesilea* opera is conducted by Gerd Albrecht with a cast, led by Helga Dernesch, that rivals without surpassing Albrecht's 1982 Salzburg performance preserved by Orfeo (3/95).

The sole witness to Rudolf Kempe's distinguished leadership of the Tonhalle is a stolid Beethoven Fifth recorded in 1968 at a gala to mark the orchestra's centenary and not a patch on the conductor's Munich studio recording. In the course of a revealing booklet essay, Peter Hagemann ties himself in knots by making a claim for Kempe's fidelity to the metronome markings that is barely more accurate in the case of a beautifully sprung First with Frans Brüggen from 30 years on.

Hagemann unsparingly charts the doldrums into which the Tonhalle drifted after Kempe's departure. Christoph Eschenbach's tenure didn't end well but space has valuably been found for the Busoni Piano Concerto which he conducted in 1985, originally issued on LP by Aperto. Boris Bloch's firm handling of the solo part holds its own against more storied interpreters, especially in the imperious rhetoric of the central *Pezzo serioso*; it's a shame that both remastering and presentation conflate the succeeding tarantella and choral finale into a single track.

Hagemann is still rather harsh on a *Symphonia domestica* ('it lacked any clear outlines') taped before David Zinman became Chief Conductor in 1995 (also carelessly presented with the Scherzo and 'Wiegenlied' as a single movement), but there is an almost brutal honesty about its inclusion alongside the *Resurrection* Symphony from his farewell to them 19 years later. The transformation wrought by

Zinman was more far-reaching yet more subtle than Norrington's contemporary makeover of the SWR orchestra in Stuttgart. There's no lack of impact to the finale's opening cataclysm, yet it ebbs away without portentous emphasis into an exquisitely achieved vision of the hereafter. Both in solo and *tutti*, the Tonhalle players match Alice Coote and Juliane Banse for dynamic sensitivity and eloquence. Fleet and airy it may be but it isn't Mahler, concluded Edward Seckerson of their RCA studio account (9/07). This assuredly is.

The orchestra's Zinman reboot made possible a shapely Haydn Symphony No 44, driven smoothly by Jonathan Nott in 2009 with some unusual, Second Viennese-style wind detailing. The neat if mischievous pairing is another E minor symphony, Dvořák's *New World*, from 2002: in the hands of Lorin Maazel, stripped of Bohemian idiom, purring with chrome-plated assurance and capitalising on the weight of the Tonhalle strings to deliver a Scherzo of unapologetically Brucknerian momentum.

On another disc of recent and contrasting guest conductors (from 2014-15), Charles Dutoit in the *Organ* Symphony faces off against Esa-Pekka Salonen in Sibelius's Fifth. Dutoit takes a sinuously Wagnerian approach to Saint-Saëns, not altogether tidy (the finale gets off to a shocker) but charged with atmosphere, on and off stage, pulling unusual counterpoint from the texture and making a case for the work, not unlike Barenboim's, as a symphonic precursor of Magnard and Roussel. The Sibelius is dynamically less refined than other accounts by Salonen, whether live or on record, and the swan theme is capped with an unlikely but wholly satisfying apotheosis in the Austro-German mould.

At the age of 28, perhaps Lionel Bringuier was faced with an impossible challenge as Zinman's successor, though he was the orchestra's own choice. A skittish and ill-balanced *Symphonie fantastique* serves to confirm why his tenure lasted only four years; local critics complained of, as one put it, 'a loss of interpretative depth, precision in orchestral work and not least creative charisma', all borne out here. The baton has passed to Paavo Järvi, whose experience surely equips him to build on the legacy of Kempe and Zinman. **G**

Venetian lagoon. There are touches of exoticism, too, as in RV163, nicknamed *Conca*, where Vivaldi creates 'wave-machine' effects with a conchiglia marina, a large seashell with an added mouthpiece.

Propelled by the percussively inventive continuo, thrumming archlute and Baroque guitar to the fore, Dantone and his Italian band are on cracking form. Some may raise an eyebrow at the exaggerated dynamic contrasts, the frequent swellings and ebbings and the unprovoked assaults on strong beats. But heightened theatricality, in slow movements as well as fast, is surely what this music is all about. Nor is there a want of poetry where apt. Violinist Alessandro Tampieri spins an eloquent cantilena in the *Andantes* of RV167 and RV163, while the drifting harmonies in the 'lagoon' movements have a mesmeric hushed intensity.

Tampieri also excels in five of Vivaldi's viola d'amore concertos, probably composed for the Pietà's famous Anna Maria, though the composer was reportedly a dab hand at the instrument himself. Dantone and his players ensure that Vivaldi's elemental, explosive energy is never short-changed. Tampieri dispatches the reams of bravura passagework with fire and grace, and adds his own entertaining, even crazy cadenzas that exploit the deep, buzzy resonance of the viola d'amore's sympathetic strings. But this flavoursome instrument also inspired music of reflective delicacy, not only in the slow movements (among which RV394's floating siciliano is a highlight) but also in *Allegros* like the first movement of RV397 and the finale of the airy A major Concerto, RV396. In fantasy, caprice and sheer virtuosity Tampieri is at least a match for his fellow Italian Fabio Biondi (Virgin, 11/07).

It seems churlish to end with a gripe. Why, though, do Naïve include only five of the six viola d'amore concertos on the second disc (running to just 48 minutes), when there would have been room to spare for the sixth, plus the delectable concerto for viola d'amore and lute? **Richard Wigmore**

'La Venezia di Anna Maria'

Albinoni Violin Concerto, Op 10 No 1 Galuppi Violin Concerto No 1 Vivaldi Sinfonia, RV140. Violin Concertos - RV120; RV158; RV248; RV260; RV270a

Concerto Köln / Midori Seiler *vn*

Berlin Classics (M) © 0301052BC (83' • DDD)



The top soloists of Venice's Ospedale della Pietà – the convent, orphanage

and music school where Vivaldi spent a significant proportion of his career as music director – are rarely given the time of day in programme notes or history books, let alone given the honour of having an album named after them, and this shouldn't really surprise. After all, not only did these women play from behind iron grills to protect them from public gaze but they even lacked surnames; girls were given merely a first name upon arrival, alongside being branded with the letter P in order to permanently mark them as being from the Pietà. As a result, this two-disc album centred around the surviving part-book of one of the Ospedale's brightest stars, Anna Maria dal Violin (her instrument earning her a surname of sorts), had my attention before I'd heard a note; and happily it's still holding my attention many listens later.

So, what to draw your attention to? Well, first that it's not just Vivaldi on offer, because in addition to his four violin concertos from Anna Maria's part-book – including the 'Christmas' E major Concerto, RV270a – and the three orchestral works, Concerto Köln have also given us an orchestral concerto each from two other composers with Ospedale links, Tomaso Albinoni and Baldassare Galuppi.

Then, second, that Midori Seiler and Concerto Köln have taken an opulent approach to the music, adding to the strings, where appropriate, wind instruments known to be available at the Ospedale; and I have to say that I love how this has worked out. In fact it's very interesting to compare their RV270a with the version just released by Rachel Podger and Brecon Baroque on their superlative *Four Seasons* recording (Channel Classics, 5/18), because, as exquisite and equally scholarly as Brecon Baroque's strings-only reading is, the gentle glow and subtle timbral contrasts that Concerto Köln's injections of recorders and flutes have lent is both utterly convincing and very lovely; just listen to the opening *Allegro*. Equally effective are the firmer-edged oboes, bassoons and chalumeaux heard in their bigger-boned disc-opener, the C minor orchestral Concerto, RV120. Add Concerto Köln's overall precise delicacy of attack and clear emotional commitment, plus Seiler's own dainty filigree lines – phrases softly rising and falling, and ever so slightly rubato'd in her solo spots – and the whole really is very good indeed.

Charlotte Gardner

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Rachmaninov's Études-tableaux

Steven Osborne talks to **Tim Parry** about taking on board the composer's own recordings

Steven Osborne's recording of Rachmaninov's Preludes (Hyperion, 6/09) has long been a favourite, and I was keen to talk to him about his new recording of the *Études-tableaux*. Osborne has been playing groups of them in concert for a few years, further whetting the appetite for his recording. These pieces are not so well known as the Preludes, perhaps partly because they are beyond the reach of most amateurs. I start by asking Osborne how he'd compare them. 'I think the first thing is that when the Preludes are difficult they sound it, but with some of the *Études-tableaux* there's a greater complexity in the piano-writing which isn't always obvious to the listener. A few of the *Études-tableaux* could easily be Preludes,' he continues, 'but in general the Preludes feel more closed, in terms of the way Rachmaninov puts them together. A lot of the *Études-tableaux* are more open-ended; you don't quite know where a piece is going to end up, in that you might get an unexpected development or change of direction in the middle. That's partly a function of their being longer, which allows him to be a bit more exploratory.'

Many who admire Rachmaninov consider the *Études-tableaux* to be among his finest piano works. Does Osborne agree? 'When I first looked at them, many years ago, they didn't quite stick in my mind somehow. It was only on returning to them more recently that I really appreciated both their construction and their emotional openness. I love the sheer vulnerability in Rachmaninov, the naked expression and that sense of not holding anything in reserve. There's also an exploration of sonority in these pieces that goes beyond much of what Rachmaninov had written before.'

We have the score in front of us, so I open it and find the A minor Étude, Op 39 No 6. When Respighi requested permission to orchestrate some of these pieces, Rachmaninov – usually so secretive about specific inspirations – sent him programmatic details of five of them, which he thought might give some useful insight. This one was described as being about the tale of Little Red Riding Hood. It interests me because it has an introduction – a menacing chromatic scale rising to a crisp A minor chord, heard twice, evoking a prowling wolf perhaps – that many pianists play at a much slower tempo than the prevailing *Allegro*. One of those pianists is Rachmaninov himself; this is one of three *Études-tableaux* that he recorded (in 1925, the other two in 1940). I'm interested in how Osborne approaches this particular passage.

'Actually I don't follow what Rachmaninov does here. I probably start very slightly under tempo, building through these rising scales. But a completely different tempo, with an abrupt change from line 2, just doesn't feel right to me.' It's also not what's marked in the score. But it does raise the question of whether one should be influenced by Rachmaninov's – or any composer's – own recordings. Osborne has his own views: 'I don't think the composer's performance should have a privileged place, partly because it strikes me that composers often misjudge aspects of their own music in performance. It's obviously a very interesting



Steven Osborne is determined to follow his own convictions in Rachmaninov

window on to a piece, and there might be times where it leads you to think that they've simply notated something wrongly. Arguably you could say that Op 39 No 6 is one of those, but personally I don't find what Rachmaninov does there convincing. He also ignores lots of his own tempo indications through this piece. I did experiment with a similar way of playing the opening, starting at a slower tempo before establishing the *Allegro* at bar 6, but I just couldn't convince myself it felt right. In the end, you have to follow your own convictions.'

Indeed. No one wants all performers of Rachmaninov to be clones of the composer himself. Osborne agrees; in fact, he's keen to elaborate. 'We're faced with this contradiction: no one would suggest that there's only one way of playing

a piece, and yet teachers often push students to do exactly what's in the score regardless of the student's own instincts. I don't think this is very helpful. It treats the music as a kind of museum piece. The Urtext culture tends to encourage the view that what the performer thinks isn't as important as what the composer thinks, and this is, in my view, fundamentally wrong: it should be more of an equal partnership. The performer should of course take very seriously what the composer has written and the way the composer plays their own music, but you should also take very seriously what you yourself instinctively feel about the music, and then try to find a way of marrying these things together. You have to end up with an interpretation that you thoroughly believe in, and that's a creative process.' So, to clarify, I ask whether this holds true whether dealing with Rachmaninov's music or, say, Beethoven's. 'Yes, absolutely.'

I flick through the score, and have only got as far as the following piece, Op 39 No 7, which Rachmaninov described as depicting a funeral march, when Osborne stops me. 'Ah, I love this one,' he enthuses, perusing the music. 'It's hard to find the right opening tempo, and really difficult to judge the second part.' He turns the page and gestures at a *sempre*

'I love the sheer vulnerability in Rachmaninov, and that sense of not holding anything in reserve'

staccato semiquaver pattern, every other note accented, all *pianissimo*. This is the part that Rachmaninov described to Respighi as suggesting fine rain, incessant and hopeless. 'Yes, and that certainly gives you a way in to the character. But it's a strange texture, and you get this odd melody that emerges, and the harmonies are weird. It's a piece that requires a lot of trust, I think.' It certainly looks strange on the page, triple *pianissimo* with all those accents. 'In the end I went for more of the triple *pianissimo* and less of the accents. This passage feels very unpianistic; it's easy to imagine a fantastic orchestral sonority, but to make it work on the piano is incredibly hard. It feels to me like Rachmaninov is after something mysterious, so even though it's marked *staccato*, I use some pedal to try and capture that mystery. Once again, as a performer you have to take something that's on the page, and from that try and figure out what the feeling of the piece is.' Presumably in lots of Rachmaninov that's not such a great leap. 'That's true,' says Osborne. 'But in this piece it feels like it is. I really wish Rachmaninov had recorded this one, as I'd love to know what he'd have done with it.'

We finish our coffee talking more generally about Rachmaninov's recordings and the range of his piano music. As we're about to part, I ask Osborne whether he's planning to record any more Rachmaninov. 'I'm going to do the First Piano Sonata, coupled with the *Moments musicaux*, Op 16,' he says. 'I've played around half of his solo piano music, but there are more things I want to learn.' What about the transcription of the Scherzo from Mendelssohn's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, I ask mischievously, aware of its difficulty and reputation. Osborne laughs. 'That's one piece that terrifies me, but I expect I'll get round to it sooner or later.' So lots to look forward to – for him and for us. **G**

Steven Osborne's recording of Rachmaninov's *Études-tableaux* is released on August 3 on Hyperion and is reviewed next month

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Chamber



Harriet Smith welcomes the Tippet Quartet's Mendelssohn:

'The Allegro con moto section has a quiet fizzing quality to it, as if the players are sharing a private joke' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 56**



Andrew Farach-Colton explores an enticing album of Piazzolla:

'Van Keulen's husky tone and expressive slipping and sliding evoke the heady atmosphere of doomed romance' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 57**

JS Bach

Sonatas for Flute and Harpsichord – BWV1020 (attrib); BWV1030; BWV1031 (attrib); BWV1032

Stephen Schultz fl Jory Vinikour hpd

Music & Arts © CD1295 (55' • DDD)



There's a lot to enjoy across this Bach flute programme, not least Stephen Schultz's

flute itself: a copy of an instrument by the Turin maker Carlo Palanca, whose slightly more refined, soft-voiced Italian tone is a great match for Schultz's own softly legato, Italianate lyricism; and indeed for the overall leisurely tempos he and Vinikour have taken across the disc. Those tempos have been capitalised upon to inject some nice interpretational touches, too: for instance the attractive way with which Schultz leans into his sustained third note in the BWV1030 *Andante's* theme; also Vinikour's left-hand ornamentations in the same movement. Likewise, there's some beautiful detail to Schultz's note-shadings in the Siciliano of BWV1031. Sure, if you prefer more forwards-pushing readings, there's more urgent momentum in Musica Antiqua Köln's even softer-voiced recording. Equally, if you like a bit of metrical push and pull then you may find the pulse of these a bit foursquare.

Still, my only half-criticism relates to the downloadable bonus track by the Pittsburgh composer Nancy Galbraith, a 'meditation' on that aforementioned Siciliano for three Baroque flutes and harpsichord (all three played by Schultz, recorded separately then overlaid). This is short (3'23"), simple and effective: Galbraith's music is largely the original Siciliano coloured with extra flute embellishments and suspended harmonies. However, it's also only available on the record label's and Galbraith's websites; and had it been slipped on to the physical or at least the streamed version, it might just have given what is overall a tastefully

and musically done recording more of a USP. **Charlotte Gardner**

Selected comparison:

Musica Antiqua Köln, Goebel

(1/84*) (ARCH) 471 656-2AB8

Beethoven

'Complete Works for Cello & Piano'

Marc Coppey vc Peter Laul pf

Audite © 2 AUDITE23 440 (145' • DDD)

Recorded live at the Small Hall of the St Petersburg Philharmonia, November 3, 2016



Beethoven's solo cello music is enjoying a moment in the sun right

now, with a series of excellent new recordings (including François-Frédéric Guy and Xavier Phillips's *Gramophone* Award-nominated set – Evidence Classics, 1/16) plus a comprehensive new study by Marc Moskowitz and Larry Todd (Boydell & Brewer). And rightly: the five sonatas represent Beethoven in the laboratory – each one an inventive, radically individual experiment in texture and form – while the sets of variations are entertainment music at its most ingeniously playful.

Marc Coppey and Peter Laul have set out to capture some of that sense of spontaneity and risk. They recorded this complete cycle in a single marathon live performance in the Small Hall of the St Petersburg Philharmonia – the venue where Beethoven's *Missa solemnis* received its first performance in 1824. And they never flag: from the first climax of Op 5 No 1 to the thunderous closing fugue of Op 102 No 2, these performances are brisk, alert and almost supernaturally energetic.

But while the recorded acoustic – which slightly favours the piano – is reasonably well balanced and clear, this still feels unmistakably like live performance. The tension can be exhilarating: *sforzando* chords explode off the page; there's an exuberant theatricality to the extraordinary cadenza-à-deux near the end of the first

movement of Op 5 No 1; and the livelier variations – as well as the Haydnesque finales of Op 5 No 2 and Op 69 – go with a headlong swagger and a swing.

In short, there's a continual static-buzz of excitement throughout these two discs. These are performances of extremes, with a strong leaning to the extrovert, and you might prefer more of a sense of inwardness and space in the slower variations, say, or the *Adagio* of Op 102 No 2. Moments of reflection are rare here, and the questioning, fantastic mood that opens Op 102 No 1 doesn't really survive the first *Allegro*, just as the pair never find an entirely persuasive path between lyricism and display in Op 69. Marc Coppey's cello tone, mellow on the lower strings, can be slightly constrained at altitude, while Laul's bright, bravura pianism leaves little scope for mystery or indeed refinement.

If asked to choose, I'd say the G minor Sonata, Op 5 No 2, is perhaps the single most convincing performance here; it's a work that thrives on volatility and outsize gestures. This is not to belittle Coppey and Laul's achievement, or the verve and conviction of these performances. But a thrilling live occasion doesn't always make for a great recording, and this set is perhaps too headstrong and too relentless for end-to-end listening. No one wants vanilla Beethoven but there is more subtlety to this music than you'll find here. And, at present, it's fairly easy to find it elsewhere.

Richard Bratby

Bhatti

Nodding Terms

Ketan Bhatti drums/pf Ensemble Adapter

Col Legno © BCE1CD16005 (58' • DDD)



In recent years there's been no shortage of classical/electronic crossovers. Although well intentioned, the problem with many of them is that they sound like just that: 'crossovers', an affected welding of one



Spontaneity and risk: Marc Coppey and Peter Laul give exhilarating live accounts of Beethoven's cello sonatas

artform on to another, like a digital watch sellotaped on to a Ming vase. I can't think of much higher praise for Ketan Bhatti's 'Nodding Terms', then, than to say that it really doesn't sound like a crossover at all. Throughout its nine genre-swerving pieces, performed with clarity and verve by Ensemble Adapter, all component elements mesh naturally. Drawing on electronica and jazz, this is contemporary classical that is innovative and most enjoyable.

Bhatti's usual metier is electronic music and 'Nodding Terms' most impresses in its complex rhythms. The opening of *Funkstoffs* features abrupt Stravinsky-style interpolations of varying instrumental subgroups in different time signatures. Bass guitar, clarinet and percussion stabs give way to resonant harp chords, before switching back again. Rhythmic pyrotechnics aside, there's deft handling of pacing, dynamics and contrast. *Laughter Leading*, a standout track, shudders back and forth with chop-and-change time signatures and long melodies moving around a fixed tonal centre in semitones and octatonic shards.

Where the tempo is slower, the music is no less carefully crafted. There are moments of quiet beauty, such as the jazzy flute-led theme of *Kords*. *Ferntendenz*

features the umbral colours of gong, cello and bass clarinet; as the piece picks up, the harp quivers on one note, Morse code-style, as the drum kit slowly slips in and out of a regular metre. Over time, the music returns to regular patterns: a penchant for the 7/8 time signature, say, and for the use of harp to create punctuations in the polyphonic texture.

Bhatti composed these pieces specifically for Ensemble Adapter, who revel in the bringing the music to life. It's another impressive recording following Adapter's lively recent Kairos disc of Donatoni chamber works. **Liam Cagney**

Brahms

Two Viola Sonatas, Op 120^a.

Two Rhapsodies, Op 79

^a**Yuri Bashmet** va **Ksenia Bashmet** *pf*

Fondamenta © FON1802030 (68 • DDD)



To a man with a hammer everything looks like a nail, and it's easy enough

to see why viola payers love the viola transcriptions of Brahms's two late clarinet sonatas. For the listener without a horse in

the race, though, the pleasure will come from hearing what an artist of Yuri Bashmet's stature can make of these wonderful pieces today, having previously given us his thoughts on Melodiya (5/88) and RCA (10/99).

Certainly, no one will mistake Bashmet's firm, plangent tone for a clarinet, and from the questioning way Ksenia Bashmet opens the First Sonata, you're unlikely to mistake these readings for Yuri's earlier accounts either. Ardour and grandiloquence have been replaced here by a pensive, almost rhapsodic approach. The music stretches, pauses and lingers; the opening of the Second Sonata feels positively becalmed.

It's become routine to describe these sonatas as 'autumnal'; but although both players can rally when necessary, you really do get a sense throughout both works of an ebb tide, of passions receding. If that's what you crave, these players respond sensitively and unaffectedly to each other, though I suspect it's not wholly coincidental that Ksenia's two capricious but intensely serious Op 79 Rhapsodies have a forwards momentum that's markedly less present when she's playing with her father.

The sound is warm, natural and lucid, but the CD comes with a gimmick: a second copy with 'Mobility Mastering',

'adapted for computers, nomad and car sound systems'. On my home CD player it increased the brightness of the viola while making the piano slightly muzzier; on my laptop it came across more emphatically but not particularly beautifully. To be honest, probably only diehard audiophiles need bother. **Richard Bratby**

Debussy • Fauré • Roussel

'French Moments'

Debussy Piano Trio **Fauré** Piano Trio, Op 120

Roussel Piano Trio, Op 2

Neave Trio

Chandos © CHAN10996 (70' • DDD)



The Neave Trio have turned to the French repertoire for their second album for

Chandos, wisely attempting, perhaps, to avoid the controversy that surrounded the programming of their earlier 'American Moments' (1/17), which placed an early (Viennese) work by Korngold alongside bona fide American trios by Foote and Bernstein. The disc also marks their return to Fauré's Trio, a performance of which appeared on their own label in 2014. I'm not familiar with that earlier version, now seemingly unavailable either on disc or download, but after reading Harriet Smith's review of the original release (5/14), it would appear that some of its interpretative flaws have been ironed out. There's little sense here of the players' exuberance intruding on the performance's integrity, and slight shifts in tempo no longer obscure the inner pulse of the *Andantino*. The new version is scrupulously played and emotionally reined in. If anything, it's a bit too cool, lacking the weight and quiet intensity of, say, the Capuçon and Nicholas Angelich.

Its companion pieces, meanwhile, came early in their respective composers' careers. Debussy's Trio, written in 1882 when he was a member of Nadezhda von Meck's entourage, bears scant resemblance to his later music, and sounds sometimes like Saint-Saëns, sometimes like Delibes. Roussel's Op 2, an ambitious exercise in cyclic form, dates from his years at the Schola Cantorum and carries greater intimations of what was to follow, not least in its opening, which seems to slide from silence into sound as the principal theme coalesces over oscillating figurations and slowly shifting harmonies. The Neaves' Debussy is all sparking elegance and wit, though they can't disguise the fact that the first movement is too long for its own

good. In the outer movements of the Roussel, the tricky balance between form and emotion sometimes slips in favour of the latter, though the slow movement, with its closely woven string counterpoint over insistent piano chords, has a dark intensity and is most beautifully done. **Tim Ashley**

Fauré – selected comparison:

R & G Capuçon, Angelich (12/11) (VIRG) 070875-2

Debussy • Ravel

Debussy Violin Sonata. *Beau soir*

Ravel Violin Sonata. *Tzigane*

Blake Pouliot *vn* **Hsin-I Huang** *pf*

Analekta © AN2 8798 (46' • DDD)



The young Canadian violinist Blake Pouliot's name will be new to most

readers, because his career and competition wins have largely been played out on home soil to date. However, those wins have been notable ones, including First Prize and Grand Prize at the Orchestre Symphonique de Montréal Manulife Competition. Certainly, his name won't be falling out of my own head after this debut album.

Opening the programme is Ravel's *Tzigane* and what strikes you instantly is that Pouliot's sound is a beauty: big, rich and warm in the lower registers, clean and clear up high, feathery and husky qualities, along with sweet and rough, all equally there in his colouristic palette. It's a sound made for Romantic repertoire and one definitely served rather than created by the 1729 Guarneri del Gesù he plays. His technique is formidably watertight, too: listen to the steady tone of his trilled double-stopping from 3'31" onwards.

Pouliot has also caught my interest interpretationally. I particularly like the rhetorical quality he's brought to the opening of the Debussy first movement by opting for slightly detached articulation. Equally, while he's more than able to deliver silkily perfect high-speed virtuosities, he won't do it at the expense of fidelity to the score. For instance, his downwards-cascading runs at 3'52" in the Debussy's finale stick out for actually honouring the direction to *cédez* or relax the speed; plenty of top violinists can't resist whooshing down these like greased lightning.

The only interpretation on the disc that hasn't quite worked for me, despite its equal fidelity to the composer's markings, is *Tzigane*'s opening cadenza; these are pages where, if things aren't to drag

through all that *tempo rubato* and *quasi cadenza*, there needs to be a strong sense of line. Pouliot's pauses meanwhile chop things up just enough to make Hsin-I Huang's steadily ticking piano entry a welcome event.

The disc ends with 'Beau soir', and don't be tempted to regard this as a space-filling petit four, because it is in fact the final treat and a fitting climax for this recording debut, so completely do its lines fit Pouliot like a glove, right from his luxuriously smoky-toned opening bars. Indeed, *Tzigane*'s cadenza notwithstanding, this is a beautifully rendered programme from a musician with soul, and ideas worth hearing. In fact I hope someone gives him a crack at an orchestral recording sometime soon; I can imagine him sounding delectable in something such as Chausson's *Poème*. **Charlotte Gardner**

Delius • Franck • Ravel

'Retrospective: French Sonatas'

Delius Violin Sonata, Op *posth*

Franck Violin Sonata **Ravel** Violin Sonata

Ittai Shapira *vn* **Jeremy Denk** *pf*

Champs Hill © CHRCDO82 (69' • DDD)

Recorded 1999. From Quartz QTZ2021



Seemingly overlooked on its initial release on the Quartz label, this engaging recital

was recorded in the Champs Hill Music Room as long ago as 1999, when pianist Jeremy Denk was in his late teens and violinist-composer Ittai Shapira in his early twenties. Quirkily programmed, it asks us to reconsider Delius's infrequently heard B major Sonata, written in Paris in 1892, as an essentially French work by placing it alongside familiar sonatas by Franck and Ravel. The juxtaposition is far from successful, however, since the lyrical effusion of the opening movement brings Strauss to mind, while the *Andante* and finale owe much to Grieg. The performance itself, however, impresses with its sweep and poise. Shapira balances weight with refinement throughout. Denk is by turns forthright and wonderfully limpid. It's most beautifully done.

Their account of the Franck Sonata, reflective and unmannered, is persuasive, too. Some, I suspect, might prefer more dramatic fire in the inner movements, where Shapira and Denk are fractionally too reined in. But the structural logic and counterpoint are cleanly and clearly presented, the opening movement

combines grace with tension and there's a real sense of quiet contentment in the finale. The Ravel, meanwhile, is a treat. Shapira and Denk have terrific fun in the central 'Blues', with its pizzicato twangs and sleazy piano figurations, while the ironies and emotional ambiguities of the outer movements are explored with a subtlety and understated dexterity that prove utterly beguiling. It's a very fine interpretation indeed. **Tim Ashley**

Dvořák

Piano Trios – No3, Op 65 B130;

No 4, 'Dumky', Op 90 B166

Mori Trio

Hänssler Classic © HC17072 (72' • DDD)



The Mori Trio – a family affair with sisters Asa (piano) and Aiki (cello) joined by violinist Werner von Schnitzler, who is also Aiki's husband – here make their debut on record with two of Dvořák's best-loved trios.

In the *Dumky* the Mori's cellist sets the scene with a great arc of sound and the constantly shifting tempos are well judged throughout, even if the tuning is very

occasionally a little rough around the edges. They patently relish the rapt sections of the second movement, while imbuing the faster writing with a rustic weightiness; here the Florestan take a more airborne approach, the music whirling and whirring away. Poise is in plentiful supply in the *Andante* fourth movement, the cello richly sonorous against the quietly marching accompaniment of violin and piano, while the violin lets rip in the surging, soaring melody (track 8, 1'54"). This is contrasted with the sparkingly characterful *Allegro* fifth movement, bringing out its folk elements with aplomb. If other groups convey the consistently varied colours and moods of the final sixth movement to even greater effect – the Wanderer are particularly impressive here – that's not to take away from a performance that impresses overall.

However, Op 65, which is placed first on the disc, is less convincing. It's partly down to tempo and partly a matter of textural balance. The first movement, for instance, sounds somewhat short on energy compared to the Wanderer, the Busch or the Florestan – it's not a case of speed per se but more to do with the way these other groups use the phrasing to get a sense of momentum. Sample the passage beginning at 4'58" (track 1): on

this new recording, cello and violin duet nicely over piano accompaniment; but as the music hots up and the piano joins in the dotted rhythms, the effect is just a touch stolid. The Florestan here start *sotto voce* and with great intensity, and as the piano takes up the action there's a sense of driving the music forwards, to thrilling effect.

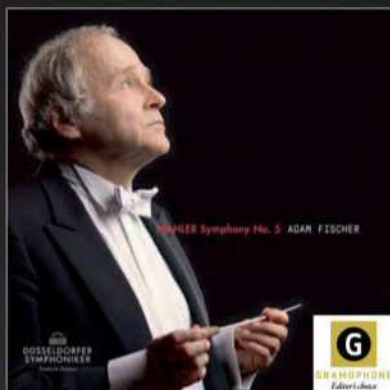
Similarly, in the *Allegretto grazioso* the Mori adopt a similar speed to the Wanderer but the effect is different – the latter fining down the string accompaniment to a minimum, allowing the piano the limelight. I like the slow movement taken at a relatively spacious tempo – the Wanderer are just a touch too fast for my taste – but unlike the Florestan, who find a great stillness in the music, the Mori just sound a tad earthbound. The finale comes across better, though, with the new group choosing a tempo that allows for touches of grace alongside the high spirits (something that the Busch Trio miss thanks to their fast and furious approach), though in terms of colour and balance, the Florestan are pretty much unassailable. **Harriet Smith**

Selected comparisons – coupled as above:

Florestan Trio (1/97) (HYPE) CDA66895

Busch Trio (9/16) (ALPH) ALPHA238

Trio Wanderer (4/17) (HARM) HMM90 2248



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Handel

Violin Sonatas – HWV358; HWV359a;
HWV361; HWV364a; HWV368; HWV370;
HWV371; HWV372; HWV373

The Brook Street Band

Avie Ⓢ AV2387 (80' • DDD)



It's funny what knots of scholarliness can get us tangled into when it comes to authenticity.

I say this in the light of the fact that, out of the nine sonatas presented on this excellent disc, only five of them are supported by the existence of an autograph manuscript: that's the sonatas in G, HWV358; D minor, HWV359a; A, HWV361; G minor, HWV364a; and D, HWV371. The other four, although they were published under Handel's name during his lifetime and sound very much like Handel, are still technically 'spurious' because no autograph manuscripts have come down to us. Surely, though, as spurious works go, these are on the lower end of the scale.

I'm very glad therefore that The Brook Street Band have given us all nine, and all the more so given the life with which they've imbued them. HWV358 earns its disc-opening status by being the earliest of the sonatas (probably composed somewhere between 1707 and 1710, making it the set's only Italian-period sonata), but also by the sheer joyful energy with which Rachel Harris goes for its first *Allegro*'s continuous stream of jumping violin semiquaver figures, as Tatty Theo elegantly bounds along next to her on the cello. The opulent harpsichord trills with which Carolyn Gibley begins the *Adagio* are another treat. Then, perhaps most of all, I love the way Harris deals, in the final *Allegro*, with the comically high tessitura on the penultimate bar's second beat; because while the first time around she makes so little of it that you could miss it entirely, on the repeat it's thoroughly unmissable, delivered with a pronounced, oh-so-wisply-elegant wink.

Indeed the various ornamentation, articulation and repeat decisions have come off brilliantly. Take the (spurious!) F major's central *Allegro*, where they've opted to repeat only the first half and then in the second half played it straight ornamentations-wise until the minor interlude 19 bars in, while all the way through offering a feast of constantly shifting note widths and weights. You simply don't know what's coming next, which I mean in the best possible way. Bravo! **Charlotte Gardner**

Janáček · Martinů · Páleníček

'Whispering Leaves'

Janáček Fairy Tale. On an Overgrown Path –
A Blown-Away Leaf Martinů Cello Sonata No 2
Páleníček Chorale Variations on the Theme
'O Sacred Head, Now Wounded'

Lucie Štěpánová vc Ksenia Kouzmenko pf
Cobra Ⓢ COBRA0069 (58' • DDD)



This is a beautifully constructed and rather beautifully played recital of

Czech music for cello and piano. At its heart is a real discovery, Josef Páleníček's *Chorale Variations on the Theme 'O Sacred Head, Now Wounded'* (1942). Remembered primarily as a virtuoso pianist with many fine recordings for Supraphon, Páleníček (1914-91) was also an accomplished composer of concertos (including three for piano), chamber music (a Piano Quintet, String Quartet and more), choral and vocal works. Variation forms feature largely in his output and the present set of nine constitutes a work of extraordinary range and expressivity. The appropriation of the Lutheran chorale acts as a metaphor in reverse for Czechoslovakia's occupation by the Nazis, the composition occasioned by the Gestapo's arrest of a local benefactor. Politics aside, it is a masterly work and Lucie Štěpánová and Ksenia Kouzmenko play it in masterly fashion.

Although a noted exponent of Janáček, I can find no trace of a recording by Páleníček of *Pobádka* ('Fairy Tale'; 1910, rev 1923), probably the best known of the works here (there are over 40 rival accounts listed by Presto Classical). With measured tempos, Štěpánová and Kouzmenko's account is worthy of comparison with any; Štěpánová's tone is rich, with impeccable intonation, Kouzmenko a most sensitive accompanist. The brief encore, arranged by Miloš Sádlo, is nicely done, too.

Martinů's Second Sonata (1941) is a sterner challenge but again Štěpánová and Kouzmenko provide an account to vie with any competitor, albeit rather slow – over four minutes behind the Watkins brothers, who generate more excitement in the outer movements. Yet the newcomer catches the lyrical essence superbly. Cobra's sound is first-rate, making this a very recommendable disc.

Guy Rickards

Martinů – selected comparison:

P & H Watkins (8/10) (CHAN) CHAN10602

Mendelssohn

String Quartets – No 1, Op 12;
No 2, Op 13; No 6, Op 80

Tippett Quartet

Somm Céleste Ⓢ SOMMCD0182 (80' • DDD)



The Tippett Quartet first came to my attention playing the music

of their namesake on Naxos, and they've since been fascinating adventurers in the byways of the British string quartet. Now they turn their attention to Mendelssohn, with a generously filled disc that comes in at just under 80 minutes.

They place Op 80 first, drawing us in to Mendelssohn's fraught world with hushed dynamics and breathless tremolos, creating a strong sense of intimacy. In the second movement they favour a slightly more legato approach than the Elias, playing up the music's dolorousness. But it's the *Adagio* in which the heart of this piece lies; and it's striking that, though the Tippett, Elias and Ebène are similar in overall timing, the effect is quite different. The Ebène, with generous tone and big individual personalities, transform it into a vocal chorale, songful and intense, while the Elias are intimate yet confiding. The Tippett are more reserved, more Classical in a sense, but perhaps a little too reined in. Their finale is emotionally not as close to the edge as some but it's impressively played nonetheless and choice will come down to personal taste.

Again, subtlety defines the Tippett's approach to the earlier quartets. In the opening movement of Op 13 they convey both the mystery of the opening bars and the febrile *allegro* writing without sounding forced; the Escher by comparison are more given to big gestures, creating a less subtle effect. But in the *Adagio non lento* I do find the Tippett's build-up to the climax (four minutes in) just a little foursquare, especially compared to the endlessly flexible Elias. The Tippett's Intermezzo goes at a nice pace – compared to which the Escher sound a tad businesslike – and the viola interjections are pungently coloured. The following *Allegro con moto* section has a quiet fizzing quality to it, as if the players are sharing a private joke, and in the finale the Tippett capture the sense of drama without resorting to melodrama and their precision of ensemble in the octave writing is impressive. But I did want



The Tippet Quartet are intimate and confiding in Mendelssohn

just a degree more sense of danger here, something the *Ebène* deliver in spades.

In the E flat Quartet, the Tippet once again have plenty to say, with an appealing tenderness to the first movement, which is warmly lyrical. The Escher take a more obviously interventionist line with it, which can sound a little forced in places. After a charmingly winsome Canzonetta, the slow movement allows the first violin to soar in the recitative-like writing, something relished on this new recording. And in the skittering finale, the Tippet achieve a fine balance of driving energy without sounding mechanistic. Good recording and fine notes by Michael Quinn. **Harriet Smith**

Quartets Nos 2 & 6 – selected comparisons:
Ebène Qt (4/13) (VIRG/ERAT) 464546-2
Elias Qt (5/07th) (ALTO) ALC1303
Quartet No 2 – selected comparison:
Escher Qt (10/15) (BIS) BIS-SACD1990
Quartet No 1 – selected comparison:
Escher Qt (8/15) (BIS) BIS-SACD1960


Piazzolla

'Ángeles y Diablos'

Allegro tangabile. La Camorra I. Romance del diablo. Vayamos al diablo. Tango del diablo.

Poema valseado. Fuga y misterio. Introducción al ángel. Milonga del ángel. Muerte del ángel. Resurrección del ángel

Isabelle van Keulen Ensemble

Challenge Classics (F)  CC72766
 (54' • DDD/DSD)



This is the third Piazzolla album by the Isabelle van Keulen Ensemble.

As with the previous entries, the players are at their most engaging in the lyrical pieces and passages. I'm quite taken with the vein of bittersweet melancholy they find in the *Poema valseado* (from *Maria de Buenos Aires*), for instance, particularly as it's unlike the composer's own breezy accounts. Their leisurely, lilting tempo plays a part, certainly, but it's van Keulen's husky tone and expressive slipping and sliding that evoke the heady atmosphere of doomed romance. She tugs even harder on one's heartstrings in the *Introducción al ángel* and *Milonga del ángel*, savouring the ache in every dissonant clash with Christian Gerber's slithering bandoneón part.

In faster selections, however, the ensemble often plays it safe. *Fuga y misterio* lacks urgency – that uneasy, adrenalin-laced feeling one gets in the composer's performances. The *Allegro tangabile* is also too tame. Piazzolla's version conjures a chaotic Buenos Aires street scene; van Keulen's group give us politely cheerful bustle. In *La Camorra I*, their sound is a marvellous kaleidoscope of vivid colour but their movements feel stiff. 'I wanted tango swing, not jazz swing or contemporary music swing', Piazzolla once said. Listen to his swaggering, gritty Nonesuch recording of this work and you get a sense of what he meant.

Am I being too critical? If so, it's because the van Keulen Ensemble have set the bar so high, and so much of what's here is compelling and freshly thought. In the frantic *Muerte del ángel*, for example, they show they've got that 'tango swing' while simultaneously illuminating facets of the music that are normally overlooked; van Keulen makes the jagged melody weep and wail like an inconsolable mourner. And with Challenge Classics' up-close, almost tactile recorded sound, it's all right in your face, just as it should be.

Andrew Farach-Colton

Prokofiev

Violin Sonatas – No 1, Op 80; No 2, Op 94a

Alexandra Conunova *vn* Michail Lifits *pf*

Aparté Ⓢ AP171 (51' • DDD)

Prokofiev

Violin Sonatas – No 1, Op 80; No 2, Op 94a.

Five Melodies, Op 35*bis*

Aylen Pritchkin *vn* Yury Favorin *pf*

Melodiya Ⓢ MELCD100 2524 (67' • DDD)



I'd heard Michail Lifits on the superb recital disc he made with the highly individual Vilde Frang (EMI, 9/11), but I hadn't heard or even heard of Alexandra Conunova, and Aparté provides no biographical information. An internet search led me to learn that Conunova was born in Moldova in 1988, took top prize at the 2012 Joachim competition and now lives in Germany. This recording reveals her as a major artist – every bit Frang's equal, I'd say, in terms of both technical assurance and interpretative daring.

Conunova grabbed my attention from the first bars of Prokofiev's First Sonata, employing a hoarse, beseeching tone and giving each repetition of the initial shivering, semitone motif its own meaningful inflection. Remarkably, she and Lifits sustain this level of involvement and imagination. At the sudden shift to B minor (at 3'01"), for instance, they evoke bells pealing near and far, creating an atmosphere so desolate and dolorous I can almost feel the chill in the air. And, speaking of cold, Conunova plays the extraordinary passage at 4'38" – marked *freddo* and described by the composer as 'like wind in the graveyard' – with a delicate, raspy scrape, as if she were drawing her bow across an icy fingerboard.

There's a wealth of detail to savour in these performances, clearly, and insufficient space to share my appreciation. So a few highlights: Conunova's boastful (and beautiful) tone in the second movement's *eroica* melody at 1'01"; Lifits's eloquent, supple phrasing in the *Andante*; the gusto with which the pair negotiate the finale's shifting metre; the way they make the work's odd, concluding phrase sound like the moral of a fable. And, in the Second Sonata, the way they characterise the fanfare-like triplets (from 3'43") so there seem to be trumpets or bugles in every direction (as with the aforementioned

bells); their taut interplay in the Scherzo; the soulful hint of bluesy-ness at 1'10" in the *Andante* (Prokofiev's melancholy memories of Paris, perhaps?); and the exhilaration of the final bars, achieved here through articulation, gesture and tonal intensity rather than mere speed.

Aylen Pritchkin (just a year older than Conunova) and Yury Favorin's muscle-bound, blunt-edged performances for Melodiya do not fare well in comparison. Where Lifits shapes the introductory phrase of the First Sonata, say, Favorin gives every note a plodding deliberateness. There's nothing remotely chilly in the way Pritchkin plays the *freddo* passage at the movement's end. They both smooth over the finale's irregular metre and, in the Second, skate through all of its sudden and exquisite changes of key. They go guns a-blazing through the Second's Scherzo, ignoring the fact that in there are only two brief *fortissimos* – at the end of the first section and in the coda.

There's no question that Pritchkin and Favorin are technically well equipped but Prokofiev's sonatas deserve greater thought and care. And that's what Conunova and Lifits give – in spades. I can't recommend their freshly considered, vividly recorded interpretations highly enough.

Andrew Farach-Colton

Ravel • Szymanowski

Ravel String Quartet Szymanowski String Quartets – No 1, Op 37; No 2, Op 56

Joachim Quartet

Calliope Ⓢ CAL1747 (65' • DDD)



Quatuor Joachim describe themselves as 'half French, half Polish'. Warmly

reviewed in French repertoire, they've conceived this mixed programme of Ravel and Szymanowski as a 'visiting card'. And superficially, at least, there are parallels between the two composers: the subtle textures, the delicately coloured and super-refined string-writing. But Szymanowski operates with a feverishness and a sometimes extravagant sense of fantasy that the master craftsman Ravel never quite permits himself.

One of the most compelling aspects of the Joachim's playing is the way they manage to articulate those similarities while creating a powerful and entirely distinctive atmosphere for each of the works on this disc. Take the opening of Szymanowski's First: leader Zbigniew Kornowicz swoons languidly in and out of the silence: this –

you think – is going to be indulgent.

And yet, throughout the programme, the Joachim combine an intense alertness to the music's colour (flashes of *sul ponticello* steel among Szymanowski's spikier moments; melting tenderness in the slow movement of the Ravel) with a dancelike rhythmic alertness (no pizzicato note ever lacks a sense of direction).

This is music-making of real personality. Vivid, virtuoso and intensely communicative, it's recorded in an acoustic that's close enough to make both the opening of Ravel's finale and the final, wild frenzy of Szymanowski's Second feel genuinely explosive; and yet sufficiently spacious to let the music float out into deep stillness (listen to the passage after 1'40" in the second movement of Szymanowski's First). There are a lot of first-rate string quartets active at present, and over-abundance can breed complacency. But if you've ever questioned whether these current groups have something distinctive to say, this should give you a gloriously listenable answer. **Richard Bratby**

Stravinsky

'Music for Violin, Vol 2'

Ballad^a. Divertimento^a. Élegie. Pastorale^b. Suite italienne^a. Tango (arr Dushkin)^a. Variation d'Apollon^c. Violin Concerto^c

Ilya Gringolts *vn*^a Peter Laul *pf*^b Casey Hill *ob*

^bScott MacLeod *cor ang*^b Juan Ferrer *d*^b Steve

Harris *wangl bn*^c Galicia Symphony Orchestra /

Dima Slobodeniouk

BIS Ⓢ BIS2275 (76' • DDD/DSD)



When reviewing the first volume of Ilya Gringolts's Stravinsky series (A/17), I cited

Anthony Marwood (Hyperion, 3/10) as the main rival, principally because of the pianist Thomas Adès, whose ability to summon tonal variety wasn't quite matched by Gringolts's Peter Laul. In general I'd hold fast to that assessment; though in this particular context, with much of what's included not actually involving the piano, it's less of an issue. The major work with piano is the Divertimento after *The Fairy's Kiss* (also the genesis of the Ballad), bittersweet music that finds in Gringolts and Laul near-ideal interpreters.

The featured version of the *Pastorale* for violin and winds brings a folklike dimension to the piece and it's good to have 'Apollo's Variation' from *Apollon et les Muses* as a sort of supplement to the Violin Concerto. Brief though it is (just 3'00"), it contains some of Stravinsky's



Lissom and lyrical: Ilya Gringolts displays a mastery of Stravinsky's idiom

most eloquent writing for the instrument. In the concerto's first 'Aria' Gringolts weaves his way among his orchestral colleagues like a glow-worm careering through woodland thickets. Dima Slobodeniouk's Orquesta Sinfónica de Galicia are alert to detail throughout the work whereas Laul is at his best in the *Suite italienne* – a version of the *Pulcinella* music not to be confused with the technically more demanding Suite for violin and piano included in Vol 1 – where the lissom and lyrical slant of Gringolts's approach is appealing. His chording in the affecting unaccompanied *Elégie* (originally for viola but here played a fifth higher) is immaculate and he offers a cockily smiling account of the *Tango* where Laul also enters fully into the spirit.

Returning to the Violin Concerto, I should also mention a memorable version by Zhi-Jong Wang with the Philharmonia under Thomas Sanderling (Accentus – to be reviewed in the next issue), recorded just a couple of months after this Gringolts performance, utterly different in style, vibrant, warm and expressive where Gringolts is svelte, bright and ethereal. Wang's coupling is a romantically inclined account of the Sibelius Concerto, so if it's the Concerto you want rather than an all-Stravinsky programme, Wang will also do

nicely; but when it comes to choosing a thorough survey of Stravinsky's violin music, Gringolts's mastery of the composer's idiom makes his CD and its earlier companion credible front-runners, or at the very least level-pegging with the excellent though rather less comprehensive Marwood collection. BIS's SACD sound is superb. **Rob Cowan**

Violin Concerto – selected comparison:

Z-J Wang, Philb Orch, T Sanderling (ACCE) ACC30430

'Russian Romantics'

Cui *Alla spagnuola*, Op 24 No 1 **Glazunov** *Meditation*, Op 32. *Raymonda* – Grande adagio. *Sonatina* (arr Rodionov) **Glière** *Romance*, Op 3 **Glinka** *Violin Sonata*. *Mazurka* (arr Safonov) **Kosenko** *Two Pieces*, Op 4 **Rubinstein** *Viola Sonata*, Op 49 – Andante. *Melody*, Op 3 No 1 (arr Auer). *Romance*, Op 44 No 1 (arr Mikhailovsky)

Hideko Udagawa *vn* **Alexander Panfilov** *pf*
Northern Flowers (© NF/PMA99130 (63' • DDD)



The corpus of 19th-century Russian music for violin and piano being less than might be supposed, Hideko Udagawa has created this recital on the basis of

transcriptions. Most significant is that of Glinka's *Viola Sonata*, whose two substantial movements afford ample indication of his early prowess but also creative indolence – there being no finale. Similarly idiomatic is the *Andante* from Rubinstein's *Viola Sonata*, its sophisticated interplay between recitative and arioso in striking contrast to the winsome elegance of the teenage Glazunov's *Sonatina* (conceived for piano). Another (re-)discovery is the diptych from Viktor Kosenko (1896-1938), affecting miniatures demonstrably in the lineage of 'silver age' Romanticism.

César Cui's *Alla spagnuola* attests to the modest charms of a composer the centenary of whose death looks to be passing unnoticed, with Glière's *Romance* an assured statement of intent from one whose easy expressiveness was unerringly suited to the Soviet era. Here, as throughout the disc, Udagawa's unforced eloquence is ideally complemented by Alexander Panfilov's responsive pianism, not least the poignancy of Glazunov's *Méditation* or raptness of the *Grande adagio* from his ballet *Raymonda* that ends the recital. For having rounded out the extent of this repertoire, Udagawa places musicians and listeners alike in her debt.

Richard Whitehouse

Julia Varady

Richard Fairman recalls the incandescent artistry of the German-Hungarian soprano who retired from public performance around 20 years ago but who has left a vast recorded legacy

As people arrived for the Edinburgh Festival in 1974 there was one question on everybody's lips: 'Who is Julia Varady?' A highlight of the programme that year was to have been a new production of Gluck's *Alceste* with Janet Baker, but at an early stage of rehearsals the English mezzo had decided the role was not for her. Julia Varady (b1941), then unknown in the UK, was her replacement.

The air of disappointment in Edinburgh was palpable, but it only lasted as far as the opening night. Within minutes of *Alceste*'s entrance it was clear that Varady was no second-rate stand-in. This was a lyric soprano voice with a dramatic edge and an impressive range. Its owner, still in her early thirties, commanded the stage.

As the audience filed out into an already chill Edinburgh August night, the talk was of a major new talent. Here, clearly, was a singer guaranteed a place as an international star in the world's top opera houses.

The reality, though, turned out to be rather different. Varady would indeed go on to be a leading player in the opera houses of Germany – her career can be followed through the many live recordings that have surfaced over the past 20 years or so – but beyond her favoured part of Europe her presence was limited. She appeared only once at the Metropolitan Opera, New York – in *Don Giovanni* in 1978, as Donna Elvira alongside the Donna Anna of Joan Sutherland. I have only been able to trace two roles at the Royal Opera House, London (her debut in 1987 as Desdemona in Verdi's *Otello*, and Senta in *Der fliegende Holländer* in 1992); and two Mozart roles (Countess Almaviva in 1981 and Elettra in *Idomeneo* in 1984) at La Scala, Milan.

Some people blamed her marriage to Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau in 1977. More likely, as she has said herself, she just

wanted to stay close to home in Germany, like Anja Harteros now – how extraordinary that two such wonderful sopranos, and so similar in voice type, should both have chosen not to exploit fully the international careers that were theirs for the taking.

As it was, the opportunities to catch Varady were occasions to be treasured. In the early days, Mozart was her calling card and her portrayals were not only well sung, but also dramatically gripping. Her Donna Elvira (I caught her in

Salzburg in 1987 as part of an all-star cast at the end of Karajan's reign) was at once highly charged and very human in her range of feelings. As Vitellia, she was the blazing centrepiece of

Sir John Eliot Gardiner's concert performances of *La clemenza di Tito* in London, as she is on his recording (12/91).

As her career progressed, Varady took on the major Verdi roles, raising her game without the slightest strain to encompass the high-octane drama of a role like Abigaille.

On a visit to Berlin I was lucky enough to catch her as Aida at the Deutsche Oper and for sheer quality of singing there was nobody to equal her. The *pianissimo* top C at the climax of 'O patria mia' hung effortlessly in the air for what seemed an age, a moonbeam of beautiful lyric tone, just as one always imagines it will be but so rarely is.

It seems ironic that a singer who trained initially as a mezzo should metamorphose into a lyric soprano with the best top notes in the business. They were shown off to fabulous advantage in Verdi's Requiem on the opening night of the 1988 BBC Proms, and again in Mahler's Symphony No 8 under Tennstedt at the Royal Festival Hall, London (1991), and on his EMI and LPO live recordings (6/11). Imagine how she would have

The pianissimo top C hung effortlessly in the air for what seemed an age – a moonbeam of beautiful lyric tone

DEFINING MOMENTS

• 1962 – *Debut as a mezzo*

Having studied at the Cluj and Bucharest conservatoires, Varady makes her debut in Cluj as a mezzo-soprano singing Gluck's Orfeo, followed by Rosina in *Il barbiere di Siviglia* – but she also sings soprano roles including Pamina, Fiordiligi and Desdemona.

• 1971 – *Association with Munich begins*

A resounding success as Vitellia in *La clemenza di Tito* at the summer festival in Munich leads to her becoming a member of the ensemble five years later, where she was to sing many of her great roles, including Countess Almaviva, Santuzza, Sieglinde and Leonora in both *Il trovatore* and *La forza del destino*.

• 1977 – *Marriage to Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau*

She marries the German baritone. They live in Berlin and sing together as often as possible, both in opera and in concerts.

• 1978 – *Creates a new role*

She creates the role of Cordelia alongside the King Lear of Fischer-Dieskau in the premiere of Aribert Reimann's *Lear* with the Bavarian State Opera, Munich. A live recording is made, released by DG in 1979.

• 1982 – *Aida in Berlin*

A highlight from her years at the Deutsche Oper, Berlin, is Aida – with Pavarotti as Radames and Fischer-Dieskau as Amonasro, conducted by Daniel Barenboim.



sounded as the Marschallin (a role she apparently never sang) launching the trio in *Der Rosenkavalier*.

From the late 1970s she was often to be found at her husband's side, which made them one of opera's power couples. Among many other roles, principally in Munich and Berlin, she was Arabella to Fischer-Dieskau's Mandryka in Strauss's opera; Cordelia to his *King Lear* in the premiere of Aribert Reimann's *Lear*; and Eva to his Hans Sachs in *Die Meistersinger*. Born of a Hungarian bloodline, Varady also tempted Fischer-Dieskau to join her in the ultimate husband-and-wife opera,

Bartók's *Bluebeard's Castle*, of which there is a fine DG recording (9/88). After his retirement, Fischer-Dieskau took on a new role as conductor in a compelling series of opera recitals that Varady made for Orfeo, featuring arias by Verdi, Wagner and Strauss.

How lucky we are that Varady left so many recordings. That niggling feeling in the stomach at not having been able to see her live in much of her best repertoire is assuaged when one looks back over the extensive spread of her studio and live discs – such a range of music, such an unfailingly high standard, and quite simply so much magnificent singing. **G**

THE ESSENTIAL RECORDING



R Strauss *Die Frau ohne Schatten*
Varady, Domingo, Behrens, Van Dam, Runkel et al;
 Vienna St Op Chor,
 Vienna PO / Solti
 Decca (5/92, 10/92)

Instrumental



Michelle Assay on Alexandra Dariescu's 'The Nutcracker and I':
'It is difficult not to imagine the flight episode of The Snowman, with Santa Claus replaced by a grand piano' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 66**



Jed Distler is enthused by extreme rarities of recorded pianism:
'Guiomar Novaes argues with her producer while practising Chopin's Berceuse at half tempo in different keys' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 71**

JS Bach

Goldberg Variations, BWV988. Adagio, BWV968

Diego Ares *hpd*

Harmonia Mundi © ② (two discs for the price of one) HMM90 2283/4 (89' • DDD)



There's a surprise for anyone who puts on this recording without looking at the booklet

first: its opening notes are not those of the famously airy *Aria* but the rather more congested and low-lying texture of Bach's own transcription of the *Adagio* from his Third Solo Violin Sonata. Diego Ares explains that he starts each day with the *Goldbergs* (does he mean all of them?) and that his habit is to approach the *Aria* via a respectful prelude. While his repertoire of choices for that could be a fascinating subject in itself, it seems dubious that one would want to hear this somewhat laboured piece in this exalted position every time. Fortunately, a single push of the 'forward' button is all that is needed.

Yet all of this does suggest that Ares has both a close and personal relationship with the *Goldbergs* and one that considers them as an entity. His reading is a regal progress in which, while not exactly playing every variation at the same speed, he finds a basic unity of pulse for them, so that none comes as a jolt upon its neighbour. The results can be unusual: Variation 1 is considerably slower than the norm and Vars 19, 26 and 28 are also on the steady side, whereas Var 25 (the 'Black Pearl') favours flow over lyricism and Var 20 is unexpectedly legato. The only threats to this calm momentum tend to come within variations, where Ares sometimes slows markedly at the ends of halves, as in Vars 13 and 15 – though his liking for cute little improvised lead-backs and links forward offers a balance. Elsewhere, ornamentation ranges from flourishes that genuinely enhance the spirit of a line to some rather fidgety twiddles; the added appoggiaturas in Var 26 are frankly irritating.

Few *Goldberg* performances will please in every detail, however, and this one – played with good touch on a firm, even at times rather macho Taskin copy – is certainly one in which we can enjoy this interesting player's justified confidence in his own skill and individuality. **Lindsay Kemp**

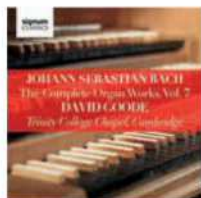
JS Bach

'The Complete Organ Works, Vol 7'
Concerto, BWV596 (after Vivaldi, Op 3 No 11 RV565). Fugue on a Theme of Legrenzi, BWV574. Jesu, meine Freude, BWV713. Nun freut euch, lieben Christen g'mein, BWV734. Preludes and Fugues – BWV541; 'Toccata', BWV566. Trio Sonata No 3, BWV527. Valet will ich dir geben (Fantasia), BWV735. Vater unser im Himmelreich, BWV737. Wie schön leuchtet der Morgenstern, BWV739

David Goode *org*

Signum © SIGCD807 (68' • DDD)

Played on the Metzler organ of Trinity College Chapel, Cambridge



David Goode has now reached Vol 7 in his series of Bach's complete organ works, recorded once again on the Metzler organ of 1976 in the chapel of Trinity College, Cambridge. This historically important Swiss-built instrument (with its lack of playing aids, flat, straight pedalboard et al) incorporates the surviving pipework of the two organs built for the Chapel in 1694 and 1708 by 'Father' Bernard Smith. With a rich palette of 42 ranks at his disposal, Goode has no difficulty in unfailingly refreshing the listener's ears, sometimes relying on a single stop to speak unsullied into the gently resonant acoustic.

Whereas some players take a sober and mechanically literal approach to the notes, Goode's slightly freer shaping is much more engaging, especially in a multi-sectional work such as the Prelude and Fugue, BWV566, which owes so much to Frescobaldi's and Buxtehude's models. This is not to say that the playing is

aimless; far from it. The Vivaldi concerto transcription is lithe and full of bounce, as is the concluding Prelude and Fugue in G, BWV541, replete with a brief improvisatory flourish towards the end of the Fugue. The Third Trio Sonata trots along quite gently with a central *Adagio e dolce* movement notable for a beautifully limpid quality, helped by the Tremulant.

A deeply satisfying programme from a player at the peak of his powers.

Malcolm Riley

Byrd

'One Byrde in Hande'

The Bells, MB38. Fantasias – MB13; MB25; MB62. Grounds – MB9; MB43. Lachrymae Pavan, MB54. Pavan and Galliard, MB16. Preludes – MB1; MB12; MB24. Ut, mi, re, MB65. Ut, re, mi, fa, sol, la, MB64

Richard Egarr *hpd*

Linn © CKD518 (63' • DDD)



A joyous upwards flourish opens Richard Egarr's Byrd recital, added by him to the

beginning of a 50-second Prelude for which the composer has already written a flurry of fast notes as an ending. But if that's the kind of thing that's typical of Egarr's natural keyboard exuberance, it's surely also a sign of the particular excitement he feels when Byrd's music is under his fingers. And if his love and respect for the composer he first got to know as a chorister is revealed clearly enough in a readable booklet note, it is no less warmly expressed in his playing throughout the course of this disc.

At first glance, the selection looks challengingly serious, consisting mainly of fantasias and grounds, with none of the variations on popular songs that make up Byrd's more immediately appealing side. Yet Egarr has no problem keeping our attention. The sheer sound of his playing is one thing, produced on a crisp, punchy but resonant Ruckers copy, beautifully recorded by Philip Hobbs. Operating at A=393, it



A quiet sense of command: Francesco Piemontesi plays the first book of Liszt's *Années de pèlerinage* – see review on page 65

has a fruity bass; but Egarr also manages to make it sing sweetly in the middle and high registers thanks to a caressing legato and sure sense of when to leave certain notes held down. It may be relevant that he knew Byrd's choral music before his keyboard music, because in lengthy fantasias that might seem rather earnest compositional exercises – how excited can you get by a title such as *Ut, re, mi, fa, sol, la?* – he is able not only to articulate Byrd's astonishingly resourceful counterpoint but also, in music that could sound dogged, to strike a thoroughly convincing balance between the music's formal structures, changing moods and metres, and moments of charming spontaneity or coursing brilliance. He ends with Byrd's most extraordinary piece, *The Bells*, an improbable set of variations on a two-note ground which, with even more 'pedal wash' effects than usual, is here turned into an affectionate tone-picture. An outstanding celebration of Byrd as one of the first keyboard greats. **Lindsay Kemp**

Debussy

Études – Book 2. *Images*, Book 1. *Estantes*. *L'isle joyeuse*

Nelson Goerner *pf*

Alpha © ALPHA404 (62' • DDD)

From Zig-Zag Territoires ZTZ326 (10/13)



This disc was originally released on Zig Zag Territoires, and

it has been a great pleasure returning to it, thanks to this reissue on Alpha. One of the most appealing characteristics of Goerner's approach is his extraordinary care in enunciating Debussy's rich harmonic vocabulary. In some of the more familiar pieces, generations of routine performances have rendered the harmonic movement sclerotic. Goerner's sensitively voiced chords explicate and revivify Debussy's harmonic topography. Each piece emerges fresh, succint and cohesive. No matter how discursive the musical narrative becomes, a sense of inevitability prevails.

The 10-voice chords occurring in 'Hommage à Rameau', for instance, are perfectly audible and their harmonic function clear. Goerner's highly developed harmonic grasp allows him to take the 'Hommage' very slowly, yet the musical structure is robust. Goerner's strategies of touch and colour seem uniquely tailored to each piece. In this most liquid of 'Reflets

dans l'eau', one marvels at the hushed calm of his *ppp*, which, despite its whisper, is as clear as a bell.

Of the *Études*, No 10, 'for the opposing sonorities', could be a case study for beautifully calibrated chord voicing, while No 11, 'for the composite arpeggios', exists on several sound planes simultaneously. No 12, 'for the chords', is possibly the most musically intelligent realisation of this piece I've heard. The legato ligatures are perfectly bound; transitions away from and back to *tempo primo* are brilliantly executed. In Debussy's centenary year, which has brought so many fine new recordings, it is good to have this marvellous disc restored to the catalogue. **Patrick Rucker**

Debussy

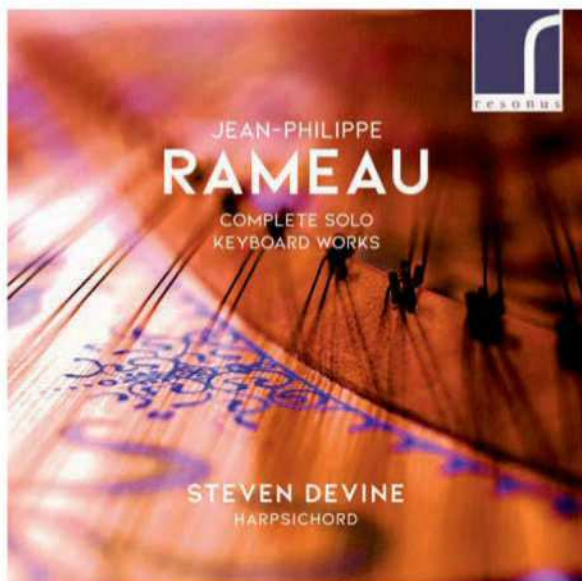
Préludes, Book 2. *La mer*^a

Alexander Melnikov, ^a**Olga Pashchenko** *pf*

Harmonia Mundi © HMM90 2302 (64' • DDD)



Érard pianos from either side of 1900 seem to have survived the ageing process rather well, at least to the point where other pianists before Melnikov (such as



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Hubert Rutkowski and Jos van Immerseel) have had the idea of recording Debussy on them, and with results that are far more than merely quaint or intriguing. But this is the first time I feel like reaching for normally taboo superlatives: such as 'revelatory'.

In recent years Melnikov has been showcasing his own collection of pianos from various times and locations, in both concerts and recordings. His Érard dates from around 1885 and was restored in 2014 (take a bow, Markus Fischinger). The range of colour and attack he conjures from it is nothing short of breathtaking, starting with a truly misty 'Brouillards', continuing with astonishing veiled sonorities in 'Feuilles mortes', then evoking all the dust and glare of summertime Granada in 'La puerta del vino', with its 'brusque oppositions of extreme violence and passionate softness'.

Time and again markings such as 'spiritual and discreet', 'soft and dreamy' and 'vulnerable' register with uncanny precision, losing any suspicion of whimsy. Put it down to hypersensitive pedalling and touch at the behest of sharp aural imagination and subtle sensibility. In fact it's not just a question of over-pedalling but at times also of daring reduction; hear the muted sparkling of 'Les fées sont d'exquises danseuses' and 'Feux d'artifice', for instance, both taken more dryly than you would think possible.

In some climactic moments in *La mer* the Érard cannot deliver the full brassiness of its modern equivalents. But there are many more passages that are jaw-droppingly beautiful, and I can truly say that the duet version has never so completely made me forget about the orchestra (bravo to Olga Pashchenko here, too).

I don't want to get into the pluses and minuses of period versus modern instruments, nor into the relative merits of different period instruments. Debussy himself owned a Bechstein (upright) and spoke more favourably about that make than any other. It was actually Ravel who favoured the Érard. Alexei Lubimov uses a 1918 Steinway for Book 2 of the *Préludes* (and a 1925 Bechstein for Book 1). His chosen instruments have their own special qualities but they sound more like a modern piano with a particular leaning towards string-section sonorities, whereas Melnikov's Érard tends more towards woodwind evocations, if I can put it that way.

To say that Melnikov matches Lubimov for imaginative flair would be high enough praise. But in point of fact he is in a league above. We'll be lucky if the Debussy centenary throws up any release as distinguished as this one. **David Fanning**

Préludes – selected comparison:
Lubimov (9/12) (ECM) 476 4735

M Galilei

Il primo libro d'intavolatura di liuto

Axel Wolf lute

Oehms © OC1877 (65' • DDD)



A keen continuo player and chamber musician, lutenist Axel Wolf's previous

recordings include music by JS Bach, Handel, Hasse and SL Weiss. Here he turns his attention to the music of a lutenist/composer of a former generation, Michelagnolo (or Michelangelo) Galilei (1575–1631), who, along with other early Baroque masters of the lute such as Alessandro Piccinini and Giovanni Girolamo Kapsberger, helped bolster the instrument's waning popularity.

A son of the music theorist Vincenzo Galilei and brother of the astronomer and polymath Galileo, Michelagnolo for most of his professional life served Duke Maximilian I in the Munich court orchestra. His gift to posterity is however a collection of dances for solo lute organised by key, *Il primo libro d'intavolatura di liuto* (1620), of which only two copies are now extant: one in Kraków, the other in the British Library. The 'suites' presented here comprise a toccata followed by a small number of Italian dances which might include a corrente, a saltarello, a passamezzo, a volta or a gagliarda or multiples thereof.

Wolf also enjoys jazz improvisation and he brings some of his improvisatory flair to the toccatas, which invariably begin with an arpeggiated flourish before unfolding in expressive waves rippling with trills and studded with crunchy dissonances. The dances, mostly in duple or triple time and often characterised by dotted rhythms, are equally flowing though less prone to variations in tempo. Here, Wolf exploits the sometimes mellow, sometimes pungent timbre of his instrument to full effect, leaving its more sonorous, darker qualities for the toccatas.

William Yeoman

Liszt

Années de pèlerinage – première année: Suisse, S160. St François de Paule marchant sur les flots, S175 No 1

Francesco Piemontesi pf

Orfeo © (CD + DVD) C944 1821 (56' • DDD)

DVD includes a performance of S160 and a documentary film by Bruno Monsiegeon



The Swiss pianist Francesco Piemontesi, now in his mid-thirties, is

quietly carving out an impressive career for himself and this latest release offers ample affirmation of his gifts. The audio recording of Liszt's First Book of *Années de pèlerinage* is accompanied by a film by Bruno Monsiegeon which is a typically sensitive affair, interspersing Piemontesi's playing with footage of Swiss scenery and quotations by writers such as Byron and Schiller, who directly inspired the music within Book 1.

But the CD will be the main draw for many. There's a quiet sense of command that is evident from the off, Piemontesi allowing the ringing chords of the 'Chapelle de Guillaume Tell' time to speak but also imbuing them with a musing quality. The melody that then emerges over tremolos is suitably sonorous, while the following bass octaves are energetic but never merely showy. Louis Lortie's choice of a Fazioli makes for a brighter, more extrovert sound here and his recording sets him in a bigger acoustic than is given to Piemontesi, playing a Steinway.

Technically Piemontesi is completely at ease with this music and feels no need to play up the virtuoso elements of Liszt's writing, while accompanying figures never get in the way of the narrative line. His 'Pastorale' has a playful clarity to it, compared to which Lortie focuses on creating a more haloed sound. The following 'Au bord d'une source' glistens in this new reading, though Stephen Hough is even more subtle in his colouring (as he is in the finale 'Les cloches de Genève', which is perhaps a tad too spacious in Piemontesi's account).

The outbreak of fearsome weather in 'Orage' is brilliantly dispatched, with the vertiginous chromatic octaves just before the minute mark superbly daring, really letting rip to tremendous effect. Lortie is more blurred here, as if the cloud cover is altogether lower. 'Vallée d'Obermann' is also impressive, combining a dark grandeur with moments of high drama that never verge on the hysterical (which they can do). After this, 'Le mal du pays' is suitably inward, with Piemontesi drawing out inner lines with sensitivity.

To fill out the disc we get the second of the *Deux Légendes*, in which St Francis of Paola walks on waves. Piemontesi imbues the opening writing in tenor and bass registers with a warmly imaginative

range of colours and here, as throughout, there's a tremendously clear sense of narrative, capturing both the grandeur and the myriad hues of Liszt's remarkable tone poem.

Hopefully Piemontesi is going to record the remaining two books, for this is very fine. **Harriet Smith**

Années de pèlerinage – selected comparisons:

Hough (4/05) (HYPE) CDA67424

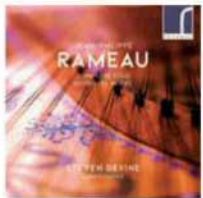
Lortie (6/11) (CHAN) CHAN10662

Rameau

'Complete Solo Keyboard Works'

Steven Devine *hpd* with **Robin Bigwood** *hpd*

Resonus ® ③ RES10214 (3h 40' • DDD)



The three individual volumes encompassing Steven Devine's complete Rameau

survey were originally available only in download format. Resonus has now released the cycle as a three-CD set. Since I've already reviewed the first two volumes (9/14, 2/15), my comments will focus on Vol 3, which contains Rameau's transcriptions of 20-odd pieces from his ballet *Les Indes galantes*, his harpsichord reductions of the 1741 pieces for chamber ensemble and *La Dauphine*, the only harpsichord work Rameau composed after turning to opera.

According to Devine's excellent and informative booklet notes, the *Indes galantes* transcriptions are essentially short-score reductions of the orchestral originals, not specifically conceived as harpsichord pieces in and of themselves. For example, some pieces are printed on three staves and contain more material than two hands can manage (Robin Bigwood helps out on three selections), while other textures appear relatively thinned out or 'incomplete' in relation to their more detailed orchestral counterparts. On the other hand, Rameau often modifies the pieces with additional counterpoint, harmonic alterations and specific directives in regard to ornamentation.

As before, Devine uses an attractively dulcet copy of a 1636 Ruckers harpsichord. Its clear yet well-rounded sonority lends itself well to Devine's meticulous technique and sensitivity in registration. For example, the sparse textures in *Air pour les Amants et Amantes* sound songful rather than threadbare by virtue of Devine's thoughtful agogic elongations of specific phrase-endings and individual notes. His employment of the lute stop in the Gavotte creates a bristling impression

not easily forgotten; the same can be said about *Air pour Zéphire* as it floats about in the highest register.

In *Air pour Borée et la Rose*, Devine may not match Kenneth Gilbert's Harmonia Mundi recording (2/80) for sheer thrust and abandon, yet he brings more contrast and disparate character to each little section. Devine's lilting, keyboard-orientated shaping of the Overture and the First *Air pour les Bostangis* markedly contrast to the heftier, incisive impression left by Christophe Rousset's more closely miked interpretation (Ambrosie, 12/09). Much as I appreciate Devine's flexible and intimately scaled rendition of *La Dauphine*, I find that Trevor Pinnock's firmer pulse and more straightforward phrasing enhances the music's variety and profile (CRD, 6/76).

Collectors wanting a 'completer than complete' Rameau cycle will find Devine to be a musician who obviously knows what he wants to get from the music and who commands the means to communicate his conceptions. For the basic Rameau keyboard canon, however, Mahan Esfahani's audacious creativity and palpable joy (Hyperion, 12/14) lure me back again and again, as do the spacious grandeur of Michel Kiener's antipodal interpretations, once available on Harmonia Mundi (2/04) and urgently in need of reissue. **Jed Distler**

Suk

Moods, Op 10. Piano Pieces, Op 7. Spring, Op 22a. Summer Impressions, Op 22b

Jonathan Plowright *pf*

Hyperion ® CDA68198 (77' • DDD)



This disc of early piano music offers a different side from Suk the maximalist,

with works such as *Asrael* and *Ripening*. And it sounds as if Jonathan Plowright has thoroughly enjoyed his foray into the world of the character piece – a million miles away from his superb Brahms series for BIS. If collective titles along the lines of *Summer Impressions* or *Spring* might smack of Walter Carroll, let me reassure you now that this is music of great inventiveness, full of flights of imagination and no small degree of virtuosity.

The first number of the *Spring* suite bursts in with quasi-orchestral textures before giving way to more lyrical sentiments, with a delicately fluttering ending. This is followed by 'The Breeze', with its gently skittering rhythms, the mood shifting again for the pulsating

'Awaiting', so full of hope and yearning. In the suite's final number, 'Longing', Suk proffers first a tumbling melody and then proceeds to fleck it with ornamentations of the utmost tenderness, before building to a climax that reminds us that these are miniature in scale only, certainly not in musical ambition, and Plowright's skills as a colourist are heard to great effect.

The modally inclined 'At Noon' from *Summer Impressions* opens innocently enough, the right hand repeating an interval of a fourth and then a fifth, but the way Suk harmonises it is extraordinarily potent. After this, 'Children at Play' is delightfully unpredictable and full of spirit – faintly Bartókian in its jumpy rhythms, though gentler in its harmonic language. 'Evening Mood' initially calms matters, though it rises to an emotional storm at its centre, with Suk conjuring a sense of both the epic and the intimate during its six-minute duration.

Space precludes listing every gem but other highlights are the musical-box delicacy of the 'Humoresque', the gorgeous languor of the two Idylls from Op 7, which are seductively harmonised, and the sheer playfulness of the Capriccio from *Moods*. Plowright's affection for this music is palpable at every turn and he's given a warmly immediate recording. Terrific notes from Jan Smaczny complete this veritable box of delights. **Harriet Smith**

Tchaikovsky

'The Nutcracker and I'

The Nutcracker, Op 71 (excs)

Alexandra Dariescu *pf* **Lindsey Russell** *narr*

Signum ® SIGCD542 (53' • DDD)



The original idea, from which this CD and its illustrated booklet is a spin-off,

was a multi-sensory project bringing together piano, dance and animation designed by the rather alarmingly named Yeast Culture. In that form, the product has been praised as a pleasant and entertaining experience for children at a fraction of the price of an actual ballet production; and challenging received norms of presentation is always to be welcomed. However, whether Jessica Duchen's text, spoken over the music at intervals by Lindsey Russell, makes for an equally satisfying experience is another matter.

As presented on stage, the programme has no narrator, and the storyline, entirely



Flexible and intimately scaled: Steven Devine plays Rameau's complete solo keyboard works

told through a cleverly designed live-action and animation combination à la *Mary Poppins*, more or less follows that of the ballet. One exception was the very opening, which creates a montage in which the animation of a young girl at the piano turns into Alexandra Dariescu, planting the idea that the Clara of *The Nutcracker* is in fact the pianist on the stage. This is far more effective than the (to me cringe-inducing) line in the CD version: 'that little girl was me'. And where the animated story leaves Clara's dream of becoming a pianist to concentrate on the dance and the magic of the ballet, Duchen's story, presumably at the request of Dariescu, attempts to interweave the piano ambition into the *Nutcracker* story, which then turns into a series of piano-practice suggestions: broadly speaking, in order to become a pianist you need to work hard and be ready to travel. The latter, odd-seeming piece of advice sets up the various national dances, for instance allowing Clara to have 'a strong cup' of Arabian coffee, almost immediately followed by some Chinese tea.

I suppose such whimsy is a matter of taste. But where is the music in all this? It is in fact omnipresent, but be ready for a lot of volume fluctuation and a substantial

amount of music lost because of the words spoken over it. The piano arrangements intersperse Mikhail Pletnev's well-known Suite – already recorded by Dariescu on Signum (1/17) – with less familiar ones by the composer, Stephan Esipoff and Percy Grainger, as well as three by Gavin Sutherland, expressly commissioned. Dariescu explains in an interview that the selection and ordering serve to convey her *Nutcracker*. So she opens with Tchaikovsky's own version of the opening number from Act 2. As an accompaniment to the clever opening animation, this less than top-drawer transcription (there is a finer one by Taneyev, made with the composer's approval) could still work, but without the visuals it hardly seizes the attention. Further on, Dariescu's playing is charming, shapely and precise, though inevitably not as breathtakingly fluent or imaginatively coloured as Pletnev's own. Best of all, perhaps, is the ballet's crown jewel *Pas de deux*, which is sweeping in its emotional breadth. Hearing the narrated story for this number, it is difficult not to imagine the flight episode of *The Snowman*, with Santa Claus replaced by a grand piano.

As a seasoned *Blue Peter* presenter, Lindsey Russell certainly knows her craft, and it would probably take a listener from

the target age-group to assess her fairly; likewise Jessica Duchen's text. For a narration more likely to appeal to adults as well as children, look for Claire Bloom's reading of Janet Schulman's adaptation of the original ETA Hoffmann story, interspersed with excerpts from Tchaikovsky's music. Or for a more recent adaptation, keeping the storyline and characters and most of the music, seek out Geoffrey Rush's narration with Nicolette Fraillon and Orchestra Victoria (ABC Classics). These, just like the best Pixar movies, prove that it is possible to appeal to all ages. Despite the attractiveness of the basic idea, 'The Nutcracker and I' remains a quasi-audio-book which may well speak to the very young but alas probably not to the young at heart.

Michelle Assay

Orlando Bass

'Piano Modern Recital, Vol 2'

O Bass Prélude et Fugue **Beach** Prelude and Fugue **Merlet** Passacaille et Fugue **Mitropoulos** Passacaille, Intermezzo et Fugue **Schnittke** Improvisation and Fugue **Shamo** Piano Sonata No 3 **Szymanowski** Prelude and Fugue **Taneyev** Prelude and Fugue, Op 29

Orlando Bass *pf*

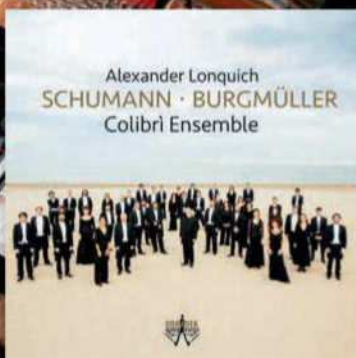
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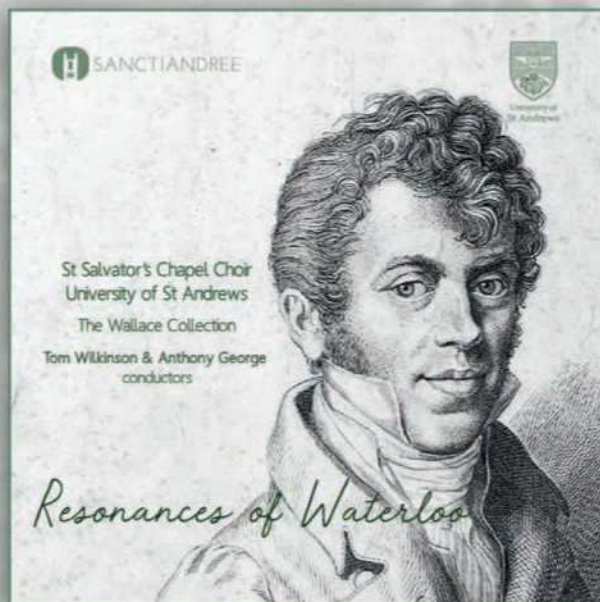
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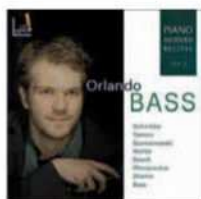
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This CD is hardly 'modern' (its repertoire goes back to 1909) and

nor is it a 'recital' in the sense of a viable concert programme. But for lovers of rare piano music, it should certainly be enticing. The series of which it forms part showcases laureates from the Paris-based Competition-Festival Modern Piano Repertoire, founded by the French-Ukrainian composer Dmitri Tchesnokov.

Here Franco-British harpsichordist-pianist-composer Orlando Bass explores the Prelude and Fugue genre and variants thereof. His useful accompanying essay explains the calculations and concepts behind his own music but unfortunately his piece fails to convey much individual personality. Similarly, complexity is not always at the service of artistic qualities in Michel Merlet's *Passacaille et Fugue*, composed for the 1986 Marguerite Long competition, which receives its first recording here, as does Ukrainian Yuriy Shamo's jazz-inflected Third Piano Sonata.

Taneyev's Prelude and Fugue has far more character and Bass demonstrates fine control of long phrases in the languorous Prelude; but even here, as in Szymanowski's sensuous Prelude and soul-searching Fugue, there is a lack of colour and tonal depth. A stern soundscape dominates in Amy Beach's Lisztian Prelude and Fugue and in Dimitri Mitropoulos's 1924 *Passacaille, Intermezzo et Fugue*, where Bass's technical accomplishment is arguably heard to its best advantage. Schnittke's 12-note rows get rather lost in the echoing environment of Paris's Temple St Marcel (go to Boris Berman on Chandos for a more lucid account), and the excessive resonance, disturbed further by pedal and damper noise, makes the whole disc an uneasy listening experience. **Michelle Assay**

Schnittke – selected comparison:

Berman (CHAN) CHAN9704

Carlo Zecchi

'The Complete Cetra Recordings, 1937-1942, and selected additional 78s'

Works by Anonymous/Respighi, JS Bach, JS Bach/Reger, Chopin, Debussy, Galilei/Respighi, Liszt, Ravel, D Scarlatti, Schubert, Schumann, F Ticcianti and Vivaldi/JS Bach Carlo Zecchi pf
APR @ ② APR6024 (152' • ADD)



Carlo Zecchi (1903-84): Italian pianist; brief but spectacular career

between the wars; abandoned keyboard for the podium 1942; two CDs' worth of 78s made between 1930 and 1942. On the surface, this would seem to be one for the piano specialist – and so it is – but I think Zecchi's recordings are so remarkable, so individual and compelling that it commands the interest of music lovers in general.

Overlook the varying quality of the pianos, recorded sound, surface noise and even (in an otherwise disarmingly touching Chopin A minor Mazurka) dropout and distortion. What characterises Zecchi's playing, apart from his fearless disregard of the red light, is his sense of purpose. He has gone into the studio to say something personal and important. As well as the fantastic finger technique, clarity of texture and long paragraphs, Zecchi leaves you feeling there is a lot more in the tank if required.

Some may find his Chopin too assertive (the Grand Canal becomes decidedly choppy in the Barcarolle, for instance, during an enthralling journey) but nowhere is he any less than convincing, even if the sound picture of the *Brandenburg Concerto* No 5 (with Arrigo Tassinari and Gioconda de Vito) militates against its complete success. Among many highlights are five Scarlatti sonatas, a Vivaldi-Bach Concerto (BWV973), a delightful *Kinderszenen* (each section vividly portrayed), three fabulous Liszt recordings ('La leggerezza' was a party piece) and a tonally shimmering 'Poissons d'or'. Add to that an ear-tickling Toccata by Francesco Ticcianti and a cracking 'Alborada del gracioso' and you surely have enough to add Zecchi's name to the Golden Age Roll of Honour. **Jeremy Nicholas**

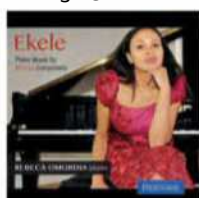
'Ekele'

'Piano Music by African Composers'

Bankole Piano Sonata No 2, 'The Passion'. *African Suite*. *Nigerian Suite*. *Variations for Little Ayo*. *Ya Orule* **Onovwerosuoke** 24 Studies in *African Rhythms* (excs) **Onyeji** *Echoes of Traditional Life*. **Ekele** (Greeting) **Traditional** *Chineke Diri Ekele* (arr Onyeji)

Rebeca Omordia pf

Heritage © HTGCD188 (63' • DDD)



There is a strong Nigerian theme running through this enterprising

programme: Theophilus Ayoola 'Ayo' Bankole (1935-76) and Christian Onyeji (b1967) were born in Nigeria, and US citizen Fred 'FredO' Onovwerosuoke was born in 1960 in Ghana to Nigerian parents. The disc is a labour of love for Rebecca Omordia, whose father is Nigerian; the results of her research are appealing and pioneering in equal measure.

Ayo Bankole dominates the disc with over two-thirds of the playing time. A remarkable character, whose presence is still felt in Nigerian music, his Second Sonata (1956-59) was inspired by Christ's Passion (his First is a 'Christmas Sonata'). The first movement is a rather sectional sonata form, the slow second a depiction of the Crucifixion, picking up on the sinister traits of the first, yet ending with music of exquisite gentleness. The final Rondo is curiously undramatic.

Bankole's skills as a miniaturist shine in the pieces for his children, *Variations for Little Ayo* and *Ya Orule* (1974), as well as the picturesque *African Suite* (1957) and *Nigerian Suite*. Onovwerosuoke's intermittently Bartókian *24 Studies in African Rhythms* has been hailed as one of the most important piano works to come out of Africa and has been recorded before. Omordia's selection of eight is nicely contrasted, executed with her unfailing technical and expressive élan. The three pieces by Onyeji, including the title-track, seal a fascinating programme. **Guy Rickards**

'In Between'

Liszt *Liebeslied* ('Widmung' von Robert Schumann), S566a **Fanny Mendelssohn** Lied, Op 2 No 1 **Felix Mendelssohn** Rondo capriccioso, Op 14. Songs Without Words – Op 19 No 1; Op 30 No 3; 'Frühlingslied', Op 62 No 6; Op 67 No 1; 'Spinnerlied', Op 67 No 4. *Variations sérieuses*, Op 54 **C Schumann** Scherzo No 2, Op 14 **R Schumann** *Fantasiestücke*, Op 12. Toccata, Op 7

Sophie Pacini pf

Warner Classics © 9029 57049-4 (78' • DDD)



An attractive theme for a programme, this, with Clara Schumann rubbing shoulders

with her husband, and Fanny Mendelssohn allowed to shine beside her brother Felix. The choices, too, are well contrasted, blending the familiar with the unknown, the virtuoso with the technically straightforward. Sadly, the execution of much of the music leaves a lot to be desired.

Were I hearing any of these pieces for the first time, had I not heard most of them

GRAMOPHONE *Collector*

BACH BY OTHER MEANS

William Yeoman finds Bach's music shining brightly whether played on guitars, recorder, accordion or a Cretan lyra



Languorously beautiful: Bolette Roed plays solo Bach in transcriptions by Frans Brüggen

Every arrangement of one of JS Bach's works expresses, as does every performance of it – and what is a performance, if not a kind of arrangement? – a hitherto hidden aspect of the work's character, whether subtle or strong. That's one thing the following recent recordings, of arrangements and transcriptions of Bach's music for diverse instruments, have in common. With the exception of the recorder, the other is how remote these instruments are from those of Bach's time. Even Michael Poll's seven-string guitar, while evoking the sound world of the Baroque lute, in no way attempts to mimic its distinctive qualities.

Even the ancient Cretan lyra, normally with three main strings and a number of sympathetic strings, accepts an extra main string to accommodate the range of Bach's five Cello Suites (No 6 for five-string violoncello piccolo not included) as performed by cellist and fourth-generation Cretan lyra player

Yiorgos Kaloudis. A little smaller than the lyra viol, the instrument is played with the nails of the left hand held against the side of the strings rather than pressing down on them. It has a pungent yet resonant tone, which Kaloudis beautifully exploits in these haunting accounts, rich in ornaments and improvised passages.

The superb guitarist **Tilman Hoppstock**, like Julian Bream, was a student of the cello as well as the guitar. His Bach Cello Suites features not just Nos 1, 2 and 5 played on the modern classical guitar but a suite comprising Bach chorale harmonisations interspersed with three fantasias by Francesco da Milano (1497-1543). Throughout, Hoppstock's trademark lavish ornamentation and use of overlapping tones to produce that campanella effect so beloved of Baroque guitarists may be excessive for some; but in the end they serve to elucidate, rather than obscure, Bach's musical architectonics.

Cello Suites Nos 1, 2 and 3 receive a very different treatment under the fingers of the Danish recorder player **Bolette Roed**, courtesy of Frans Brüggen's masterly arrangements; also included are 11 movements from the Sonatas and Partitas originally for solo violin. Recorded in the church of Augustenborg Castle in Denmark, Roed's performances honour the spare elegance of Brüggen's arrangements while admitting of flexible tempos and generous breaths between phrases. The Allemanda in D minor is languorously beautiful, while faster movements such as the *Allegro assai* from the Sonata No 3 in C major truly give the impression of two recorders playing instead of one.

The classical guitar arrangements on **Mats Bergström's** 'Sei Solo' of the Sonatas and Partitas originally for solo violin are in many ways the most orthodox here. But, as Bergström writes in his booklet note, he wanted to make these works 'sound as if they were written for guitar', following Bach's example by examining the latter's lute version of Partita No 3, a keyboard arrangement of Sonata No 2 and so forth. The result is a beauty of sound that is as compelling as Bergström's natural, unaffected yet deeply expressive playing. Bergström's Chaconne from the Partita in D minor is especially impressive and wholly guitaristic.

Also impressive is **Michael Poll's** '7-String Bach', comprising classical guitar staples, the Lute Suites Nos 1 and 4. Recalling the playing of such masters as Göran Söllscher and Paul Galbraith, who perform on an 11-string and eight-string guitar respectively, Poll goes for a relaxed forward momentum, moderate tempos, minimum rubato and crisply executed ornaments. As he writes: 'I began this project on a quest for objective truth in the aesthetics of a particular compositional language.' Thank goodness he quickly realised, by his own admission, the futility of such a quest.

The second volume in the **Montenegrin Guitar Duo's** complete *English Suites* is every bit as good as the first, with Goran Krivokapić and Danijel Cerović divvying up the left- and right-hand keyboard parts of the Suites Nos 4-6 while allowing for frequent swapping of parts. The precision of ensemble, the clarity of articulation, the rhythmic vitality and the exuberant ornamentation recall the Bach-playing of Presti and Lagoya and

the Assad Brothers, while adopting a more subtle approach to those changes in timbre and colours so idiomatic to the classical guitar.

Where Bolette Roed's recorder evokes the sound of a solitary organ pipe, **Andreas Borregaard's** arrangement of Bach's *Goldberg Variations* for piano accordion freely proclaims that instrument's kinship with the organ. It also has two manuals, facilitating the playing of passages which were written for two harpsichord manuals; in addition, as Borregaard notes, the accordion's bellows allow the sound to be shaped 'in a way that is impossible to achieve on the organ, piano or harpsichord'. This is terrific playing, by turns dancelike, lyrical and infused with a good-humoured reverence for such a distillation of Bach's art as the *Goldbergs*.

If Bach's music has submitted to more arrangements, adaptations and transcriptions than any other composer's through the centuries, that's possibly owing to its universality and to the algorithm-like nature of its motivic development. The above recordings however offer something more: openness, solitude, intimacy and even a strangeness which leads straight back to the originals – if there can ever be such a thing. **G**

THE RECORDINGS



Bach Cello Suites Nos 1-5
Yiorgos Kaloudis *Cretan lyra*
DNA Label (F) ② 5200106 432384



Bach Cello Suites Nos 1-3, etc
Tilman Hoppstock *gtr*
Christophorus (F) CHR77422



Bach Sonatas, Partitas, Suites
Bolette Roed *rec*
Ondine (F) ② ODE1323-2D



Bach 'Sei Solo' - Sonatas & Partitas
Mats Bergström *gtr*
Mats Bergström (F) ② MBCD05



Bach Lute Suites Nos 1 & 4
Michael Poll *seven-stg gtr*
Orchid (F) ORC100082



Bach English Suites Nos 4-6
Montenegrin Gtr Duo
Naxos (M) 8 573676



Bach Goldberg Vars
Andreas Borregaard *accordion*
BIS (F) BIS2399

played by some of the greatest pianists of the last century, perhaps I would be impressed by the playing of Sophie Pacini, a young German-Italian pianist (b1991, Munich), but the opening track set alarm bells ringing, one of the lumpiest accounts of the Schumann-Liszt 'Widmung' I have ever heard. Listen to Eileen Joyce (1936) or Jorge Bolet (various) *multa inter alios* and you'll see what I mean. Pacini's rubato sounds applied externally, an element that prevails throughout the recital, and with the leading voice often confused with the accompaniment. Schumann's *Fantasiestücke* and *Toccata* suffer from a heavy hand and too much pedal. I could have overlooked the shortcomings of her *Variations sérieuses* had I not recently listened to a wonderful (previously unissued) account by Abram Chasins made in 1931 (now on 'Landmarks of Recorded Pianism, Vol 1' – see review below) with a degree of tonal finesse and imagination unknown to Pacini (listen to Var 11, for example).

Fanny Mendelssohn's single *Song Without Words* and three out of the five by her brother are the most successful items here, played with great warmth and sincerity, as is Clara Schumann's rarely heard Scherzo, Op 14 (though more dynamic contrast and a sharper rhythmic stability would be welcome). Pacini has a good finger technique, a lot of energy and, according to her publicity, a charismatic stage presence. Perhaps that will be enough to see her through. But for a recording that invites repeated listening, I'm afraid it is not.

Jeremy Nicholas

'Landmarks of Recorded Pianism, Vol 1'

Beethoven Piano Sonata No 7, Op 10 No 3 – 2nd movt (exc)^a; 3rd movt (exc)^b **Brahms** Capriccio, Op 116 No 7^c. Intermezzo, Op 119 No 3^c **Chopin** Étude, Op 25 No 6^d. Mazurka No 22, Op 33 No 1^d. Waltz No 14, Op *posth*^e **Glinka/Balakirev** The Lark^f **Liszt** La campanella, S141 No 3^g **Mendelssohn** Scherzo a capriccio, WoO3^h. *Variations sérieuses*, Op 54^h **Mozart** Piano Concerto No 9, 'Jeunehomme', K271ⁱ **Rachmaninov** Piano Concerto No 2, Op 18^j **D Scarlatti** Keyboard Sonatas^k – Kk9; Kk14; Kk450 **Schoenberg** Three Pieces, Op 11 – No 2, Mässig^k **Stravinsky** Petrushka – Danse russe^l **Tchaikovsky** Piano Concerto No 1, Op 23 – excs^b ¹Alfred Cortot, ^hAbram Chasins, ^gIvan Davis, ⁱIso Elinson, ^aVladimir Horowitz, ^jStanley Hummel, ^bJosef Labor, ^dDinu Lipatti, ^fGuimar Novaes, ^hErvin Nyiregyházi, ^lLeff Pouishnoff, ^eMoritz Rosenthal *pf* ^fLittle Orchestra Society / Thomas Scherman; ⁱLondon Symphony Orchestra / Sir Adrian Boult; ^bPhiladelphia Orchestra / Fritz Reiner

Marston mono/stereo (F) ② 52073-2 (157) • ADD
Recorded 1921-80



Piano rarities rule the roost in this long-anticipated release.

Let's start with its rarest of rarest, a portion of the Beethoven Op 10 No 3 Sonata's slow movement in a strikingly free and conversational recording from around 1921 by Brahms's close friend Josef Labor (1842-1924). Other scarcely known pianists include Iso Elinson in an effortlessly tossed-off 1932 Chopin double-thirds Étude and Stanley Hummel in 1960 gorgeously singing out the Glinka/Balakirev *The Lark*.

We hear Ivan Davis sailing through Liszt's 'La campanella' on a television show promoting the infamous Siena Pianoforte, later revealed to be just a modern upright. Veteran Liszt pupil Moritz Rosenthal's uneven last recording sessions yielded a strong, recently discovered take of Chopin's E minor Waltz. A rejected 1927 test pressing with Alfred Cortot in Stravinsky's 'Russian Dance' from *Petrushka* abounds with wrong notes, yet it conveys great character – and notice the beautifully shaded left-hand scales.

I don't share Benko's enthusiasm for Leff Pouishnoff's rather workaday live 1946 Rachmaninov Second Concerto; nor do I hear anything in Ervin Nyiregyházi's 1978 Schoenberg Op 11 No 2 beyond ponderous pounding, despite his uncanny dynamic range. Yes, the composer was dumbstruck by the pianist's interpretation in 1935, but that was then. However, a previously unpublished 1931 Mendelssohn *Variations sérieuses* testifies to the young Abram Chasins's breathtaking mastery.

Nineteen minutes survive from a smouldering live 1932 Horowitz/Fritz Reiner/Philadelphia Orchestra Tchaikovsky First Concerto, captured by Bell Labs in amazingly vivid sound for the era. Two brief rehearsal snippets with Horowitz letting off steam, however, are chicken soup next to a recording session mini-drama where Guimar Novaes simultaneously argues with her producer, threatens to leave her record company and practises Chopin's Berceuse at half tempo in different keys. She's redeemed by a winged and songful live 1950 Mozart K271 Concerto. Extensive booklet notes recount the fascinating stories behind each recording. Let's hope that Marston's Landmarks project will prevail beyond Vol 1. **Jed Distler**

Frederic Rzewski

The American composer-pianist, now 80, defies categorisation, writes **Jed Distler**

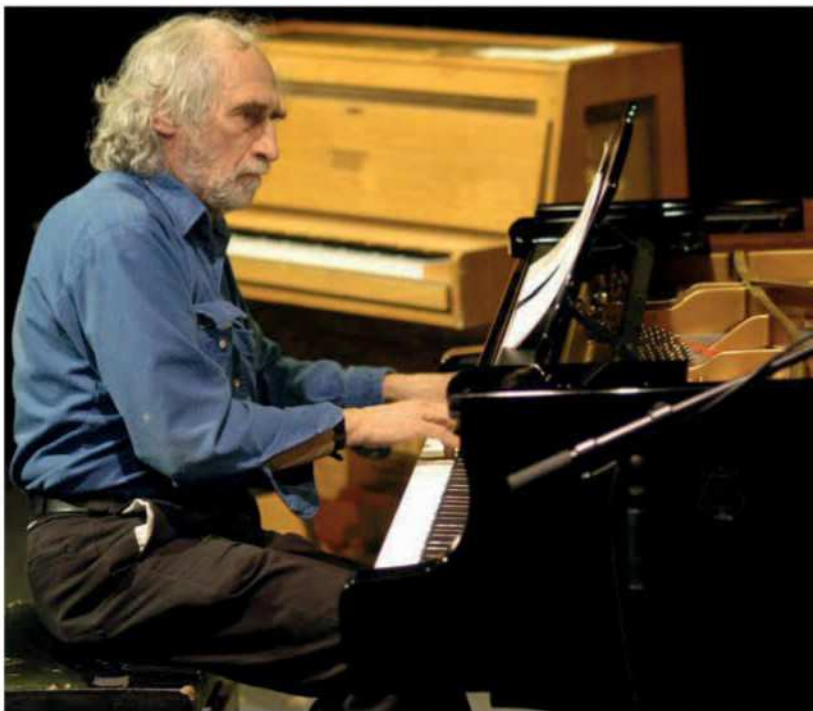
Manifesto more than music seemed to hover over New York City's music scene in 1976. On the one hand, modernists like Babbitt, Carter, Boulez and Charles Wuorinen cast their uncompromising shadow; on the other, local premieres of music by Steve Reich and Philip Glass edged minimalism closer to the mainstream. Rediscovered swing-era veterans like singer Alberta Hunter and stride pianist Joe Turner held forth in Greenwich Village, while soon-to-be-gentrified Soho provided a forum for avant-garde jazz and genre-bending experimental music. It was a dizzying time for us budding undergraduate music students torn in all directions; likewise for Europe-based American composer and pianist Frederic Rzewski, then living in New York (he returned to Europe in 1977, settling in Brussels). He briefly played with the Glass and Reich ensembles, yet you also could catch him giving heady recitals in small venues, with repertoire ranging from Boulez's Second Piano Sonata, Eisler's Third and Beethoven's *Hammerklavier* to Tom Johnson's *An Hour For Piano*.

I knew something about Rzewski's formidable pianism from my well-worn LP of Stockhausen's *Klavierstück X*. But my fellow musician classmate David Feingold turned me on to something even wilder, more atonal and more freewheeling than the free jazz occupying my attention: a recording by Musica Elettronica

'It's interesting to have pieces with a chaotic spin which goes nowhere'

Viva (MEV), an acoustic-electronic improvising aggregation whose founder members included Rzewski, Richard Teitelbaum and Alvin Curran. He also brought over an LP with dayglo cover art containing Rzewski's composition *Coming Together* (1972). Instead of MEV-like mayhem, this music abounded with gritty, chugging rhythms, along with obsessive repetitions of musical phrases and texts from a letter written by the convicted radical activist Sam Melville, a key figure and victim of the 1971 Attica Prison riots. It felt improvisatory, yet it clearly wasn't improvised. Nor was it quite jazz, nor rock, nor classical. It seemed closer to Terry Riley's *In C* in terms of style (maximal minimalism?), if not content.

None of this, however, prepared me for Ursula Oppens's November 1976 New York premiere of Rzewski's piano piece *The People United Will Never Be Defeated!* (1975). Following a defiant Chilean resistance tune, 36 virtuosic variations unfolded, alternating between brash romanticism, pointillist post-Webern explosions, jazzy reflections, pompous marches, modal musings and increasingly intensified allusions to the theme. It lasted about an hour. To my 'expert' 19-year-old ears, it felt like an eternity. How could Rzewski write something so pretentious and self-indulgent? I resolved never to hear it again.



The piano remains Rzewski's primary creative focus

But I did – when Rzewski himself played it in upstate New York. This time it bowled me over. Its stylistic juxtapositions now sounded audacious and daring rather than contrived, unified by a tightly knit structure that I hadn't noticed before. Before the theme's final recapitulation, Rzewski improvised a long, dazzling cadenza. Suddenly the idea that one could be a classical pianist, a composer and an improviser all at the same time hit home, and I unwittingly landed a role model, who eventually become a mentor, a colleague and a friend.

Rzewski started playing the piano aged four, and was already trying to compose. His first music teacher, Charles Mackey, was a crucial influence. 'When he saw that I was writing little pieces that fooled around with dissonances,' Rzewski told me, 'he said, "If you want to write this kind of music you should really listen to the people who are experts at it," and turned me on to Schoenberg and Shostakovich. Mackey talked to me about Hegel and Schopenhauer and had strong leftist sympathies. He instilled in me the idea that music shouldn't be just notes and sounds and numbers but have something to do with reality. Reality is both rational and irrational. The universe has a structure with elements that can be predicted, but there are things that have no structure and that cannot be predicted. I think it's interesting to have pieces with an elaborate structure and, at the same time, a basically chaotic spin which goes nowhere and that may lead to unpredictable and even incoherent results. And I think this helps to make the music more like real life.'

Rzewski found this attitude severely lacking in his subsequent studies at Harvard and Princeton, and he gravitated instead towards fellow radicals like David Behrman and Christian Wolff (who introduced him to Cage and Tudor). Yet he does remain grateful for his early grounding in traditional counterpoint, and finds that many younger composers lack this skill.

Moving to Europe, Rzewski claims, helped him to stake out his identity. A Fulbright scholarship (1960) allowed him to study in Florence with Dallapiccola; at the same time, he established his reputation as a dynamic, incisive new-music pianist, collaborating with Gazzelloni, Maderna and

RZEWSKI FACTS

Born Westfield, MA, April 13, 1938
Breakthrough work The People United Will Never Be Defeated! (1976)

Awards and honours Honorary doctorate, University of Liège (2009); member of the American Academy of Arts and Letters (2009) and the Berlin Academy of Arts (2014)

Rzewski on Rzewski 'There are two Frederic Rzewskis: the composer and the piano player, and they're on very good terms with each other, they [...] respect each other's individual needs'

the 1970 Kent State massacre, Rzewski sets the opening of the Declaration of Independence in the fashion of an incantatory cantus firmus, where the metrically shifting piano writing makes a fascinating foil to the text's sober, lofty sentiments.

Another crucial contact was Cardew, whose last piano works embraced 19th-century tonal idioms in order to depict social realism. Rzewski developed these ideas in *No Place to Go but Around* (1974), a short set of variations. In retrospect, its harmonic and pianistic characteristics seem to be a prototype of the longer *The People United*. Political and social issues similarly inform other piano variation sets such as *Mayn Yingele* (1988), as well as *The Price of Oil* (1980) for mixed ensemble, and two choral pieces, *Stop the War!* and *Stop the Testing!* (both 1995). The *North American Ballads* (1978-79) for piano are four fantasies based on traditional folk songs addressing social issues. Originally written for Paul Jacobs, they count among Rzewski's most frequently performed piano works, particularly 'Winnsboro Cotton Mill Blues'. It begins with relentless, motoric rhythmic patterns in the piano's deep bass. The patterns become forearm clusters of almost unbearable intensity, although moments of lyrical respite seep through the grim exterior.

Political overtones are less pronounced yet still present in Rzewski's 1991 Piano Sonata, in which popular song and classical rigour engage in heated battle. Its central movement is a murky, haunting fantasy on the military bugle call Taps. By contrast, the first movement features six themes that no one in their right mind would juxtapose: *L'homme armé*, 'Ring around the rosie', 'When Johnny comes marching home', 'Santa Claus is coming to town', 'Three blind mice' and Lennon's 'Give peace a chance'. What's more, the movement is partitioned into sections, each lasting half as long as the previous one, so that the tunes crush and compress, vainly struggling to breathe. *L'homme armé* returns in the third movement as the theme for a madcap set of variations. When I asked Rzewski why variation form so often features in his music, he said, 'I don't know, I guess it's just a bad habit.'

Although Rzewski makes no great claims as an orchestral composer, his *A Long Time Man* (1979) for piano and orchestra and his Piano Concerto (commissioned for the BBC Proms, 2013) are inventive and skilfully wrought. His extensive chamber music output tends to embrace unconventional instrumental combinations and open scoring. For stylistic breadth and dramatic impact, his two-hour oratorio *The Triumph of Death* (1987-88; for string quartet plus any number of singers) may well be his theatrical masterpiece. It's based on Peter Weiss's

Stockhausen, among others. When MEV was formed in Rome during the mid-1960s, the city was a hotbed of artistic innovation. This atmosphere lent itself to MEV's organic fusion of improvisational and theatrical elements, and spilt over into Rzewski's evolving compositional output. Aspects of what would later emerge as minimalism are present in *Coming Together* and *Attica* (both 1972), and also in the additive melodic formulas throughout *Les moutons de Panurge* (1969). In *Jefferson* (1970), composed following

play *Die Ermittlung*, encompassing harrowing testimony from both victims and perpetrators at the Nuremberg trials. *Antigone-Legend*, Rzewski's 1982 setting of Brecht's poem translated into English, also qualifies for oratorio status, covering terse, turbulent and technically demanding ground over 53 minutes, as piano and voice weave in and out, barely pausing for air.

By and large, the piano remains Rzewski's primary creative focus, although he often incorporates sounds from household and novelty items, utilises the piano lid percussively, or asks the performer to gesticulate, vocalise or whistle. While Rzewski may not have invented the 'speaking pianist' genre, he has incorporated spoken text into solo piano works to powerful and original effect, notably in the 1992 *De profundis*, an abridged setting of Oscar Wilde's letter to Lord Alfred Douglas from Reading Gaol. The full gamut of Rzewski's keyboard aesthetic can be found in *The Road* (1995-2003), whose eight large sections divide into a total of 64 smaller 'miles'. The sections grow longer as the music progresses, with the whole lasting around nine hours – or more, depending on tempos or whether one improvises or not (Rzewski often indicates places in his scores to insert an optional improvised cadenza). Michael Schell describes *The Road* as 'a postmodern counterpart to Liszt's *Années de pèlerinage*', and Rzewski likens it to 'a novel for piano', in the sense that its structure alludes to the tradition of solo piano long-form literature like the Fitzwilliam Virginal Book, or Bach's *Das wohltemperirte Clavier*, to be played at home, in one's own time. Yet one might say the same for Rzewski's cycles of shorter pieces, such as the books of *Ludes* (1990-91), or his series of 56 *Nanosonatas* (2006-10), mainly written in tribute to family and friends.

At 80, Rzewski remains a protean pianist who continues to perform his own works with a sense of dynamism, concentration and personal projection from which aspiring Rzewski interpreters can learn. Yet he's also happy that recent big works commissioned for younger pianists like Daan Vandewalle (*Songs of Insurrection*, 2016) and Igor Levit (*Ages*, 2017) are in safe hands. In essence, Rzewski is continuing to shape and revitalise the time-honoured composer-pianist tradition. **G**

THE BEST RZEWSKI RECORDINGS

A variety of works, many featuring composer as pianist

**'Fred'**

Eighth Blackbird

Cedille

Early and later examples of Rzewski's provocative ensemble writing receive their most incisive and

committed performances on disc here.

**Antigone-Legend. Jefferson**

Carol Plantamura *sop* Frederic Rzewski *pf*

New World

Each of these works adds up to a vocal tour de force, abetted by Plantamura's forthright delivery, clear diction and spot-on pitch. To label Rzewski as an accompanist is like calling a nuclear reactor an extension cord.

**'Rzewski Plays Rzewski: Piano Works, 1975-1999'**

Frederic Rzewski *pf*

Nonesuch (11/02)

No one plays Rzewski quite like Rzewski, and the kinetic energy and cumulative sweep he brings to studio recordings here convey the potency of his live performances in a seven-disc set that belongs in any serious piano collection.

Vocal



Tim Ashley hears Albert Roussel's exotic Evocations: *'Tortelier is wonderfully alert to the mercurial shifts in mood and occasional hints of violence'* ► REVIEW ON PAGE 79



Alexandra Coghlan enjoys a new choral work by Gabriel Jackson: *'Portamentos trickle down from the upper voices like tears running down the face of melody'* ► REVIEW ON PAGE 82

JS Bach

'The Solo Cantatas for Bass'

Cantatas - No 56, Ich will den Kreuzstab gerne tragen; No 82, Ich habe genug; No 158, Der Friede sei mit dir

Christian Senn bass-bar laBarocca / Ruben Jais
Glossa © GCD924102 (55' • DDD • T/t)



The inherited gravitas of Bach's bass cantatas in post-war recorded history

began with the iconic reflections of Hans Hotter and Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau, leading in the 1990s to the sophisticated psychology of Matthias Goerne, one whose fervent characterisation finds an additional dimension in Roger Norrington's suave 'period' accompaniment. The Chilean baritone Christian Senn takes us on yet another journey, under the carefully watchful support of Ruben Jais and laBarocca, drawing on the historical ideals of contemporary 18th-century poetics, namely how rhetorical delivery governs musical decisions, especially phraseology.

To a certain extent, this is what musicians tend to do anyway, but Senn's urgent and throbbing reading of *Ich will den Kreuzstab* turns out to be rather more than an authenticist's gimmick. His controlled and rich baritone enacts this wonderful cantata's opening 'scena' with all the intensity of Barry McDaniel's exquisite reading for Fritz Werner (Erato, 1/05), the emerging triplets carrying the weight of the Cross to Calvary with unusually effective imagery. Likewise, the release of the burden in the subsequent aria is accentuated by a deft dialogue between the delightfully throaty and immediate oboe obbligato of Nicola Barbagli and the elevating effect of Senn's balletic coloratura alongside crisp articulation.

But the lifeblood of these performances is, thankfully, promulgated by concerns beyond historical rectitude. Senn's natural fluency finds a willing partner in Ruben

Jais's wonderfully arching and logical phrases in which each 'tableau' seems to project the kernel of the verse's meaning; the valedictory 'Aria con Choral' of *Der Friede sei mit dir* is a case in point where the chorale and the crystalline solo violin circumnavigate the vocal line in one of those archetypal Bachian conceits of world-weariness and the joyful prospect of eternal rest.

Ich habe genug is mellifluous, deeply thoughtful and devoid of the generic mannerisms which inevitably creep into this ubiquitous work. There are more pristinely curated versions (and there is a tendency for a lumpy and somewhat prosaic bass here) but Senn's unwavering line and summoning of atmosphere in each seam of 'Schlummert ein' is truly memorable. The deftly expanding instrumental dynamic before the return of the opening is like watching a chrysalis open. Convincing and original, this recital sits in the upper echelons of a significant list of eminent accounts of these favourite Bach cantatas.

Jonathan Freeman-Attwood

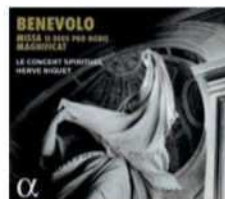
Benevolo

Benevolo Missa Si Deus pro nobis. Magnificat a 16 voci. Regna terrae interspersed with

Anonymous Ne avertas faciem tuam a puero tuo Frescobaldi Canzon vigesimanona
Monteverdi Cantate Domino Palestrina Beata es, virgo Maria

Le Concert Spirituel / Hervé Niquet

Alpha © ALPHA400 (61' • DDD • T/t)



This is a project that has been 20 years in the making. In 1996

Hervé Niquet and Le Concert Spirituel released a recording on Naxos of polychoral works by Orazio Benevolo – a French composer based in Rome during the 17th century, whose monumental, often festal works delight in the spatialised sonic drama of the *stile moderno* with its scattered choirs and

instrumental ensembles. Now Niquet returns to a composer whose music is so much more than a novelty, making a powerful case for works whose sheer scope is both their appeal and a significant barrier to their rediscovery.

This new recording places the composer's mighty *Missa Si Deus pro nobis* (never before recorded) at its heart, framing it liturgically with a processional plainchant hymn, Monteverdi's *Cantate Domino* by way of Introit and Benevolo's own 16-voice *Magnificat* as a Communion motet. The effect, enhanced by the vivid immediacy and careful balance of a recording made at Paris's Notre-Dame du Liban, makes congregants of its listeners, surrounded on all sides by the eight choirs of Le Concert Spirituel (whose forces include both singers and instruments and range from five to 10 performers).

What's startling here is the range and intricacy of the polyphonic effects woven through Benevolo's Mass. Monumentality is never reduced to one-note grandiosity, and textures vary from the tender sensuality of the suspension sequences of the *Christe* that roll, wave-like, from choir to choir, to punchier, more declamatory homophony in the *Credo* and rhythmically charged contrapuntal dances in the second *Kyrie*. If there is a casualty among so much splendour it's harmonic interest; this is music whose paths might be limited but whose textural landscapes along the route more than make up for that.

Shawms and dulcians and even a racket add their wonderfully characterful rasp and husk to the purer voices of Niquet's singers, creating a multi-dimensional sonic tapestry of gritty beauty. The *Magnificat*, with its lean verse sections, varies the pace pleasantly, and the Monteverdi has all the rhythmic definition and urgency you'd want, as well as an unusual grandeur and scope from its vast forces.

As compelling sonically as it is historically, this is a recording whose interest extends well beyond the specialist – a glorious re-creation not just of a lost composer but of an era. **Alexandra Coghlan**



The Early Opera Company give an excellent account of Handel's one-act pastoral entertainment *Acis and Galatea*

F Couperin

Leçons de Ténèbres. Quatre Versets d'un motet. Messe pour les couvents - Agnus Dei. Salvum me fac Deus

Chantal Santon Jeffery, Anne Magouët *sops*

Benoît Arnould *bass* *Les Ombres /*

Margaux Blanchard, Sylvain Sartre

Mirare © MIR358 (63' • DDD • T/t)



Although one of the many fine baroque chamber ensembles to have emerged from

the Schola Cantorum Basiliensis, *Les Ombres* have a definite French leaning, evident not only in their personnel but in the music they have chosen to record so far, which includes Couperin's *Les nations* and Telemann's 'Paris' Quartets. Here they invite two French sopranos to join them for three of the shining jewels of the Baroque, Couperin's achingly beautiful *Leçons de ténèbres* for one and two voices and continuo.

Both have voices pleasingly suited to this transparent music: Chantal Santon Jeffery, who sings the First *Leçon*, has the weightier and more dramatic voice of the two, as befits her operatic experience, while Anne

Magouët, a singer with a background in more intimate settings, is lighter and a touch more mellifluous in the Second, also managing to incorporate Couperin's ornamentation more gracefully into the line. And, anyway, it pays to have a recognisable but not too grating difference between the singers in this music, especially when it comes to the Third *Leçon*, in which they join together in sublime but characterful duet. *Les Ombres* give variety to the continuo as well, with harpsichord replacing the more usual organ alongside theorbo and gamba in the First and Third *Leçons*. These are honest and stylish performances of this wondrous music that successfully balance emotional weight and responsiveness to text with elegance and composure.

The couplings here are unusual, including a short liturgical organ piece and four verses of the psalm *Mirabilia testimonia tua*, in which the singers are joined by flutes and violins in a strangely disparate sequence that begins in the memorable sound world of intertwining unaccompanied sopranos and elsewhere features delicately high-lying continuo. The solo bass motet *Salvum me fac Deus*, also with violins and flutes and claimed here as a premiere recording, is for

Couperin a surprisingly bold and large-scale setting in several strongly characterised sections, and is confidently and lithely sung by Benoît Arnould. A rewarding and well-executed look into the often under-appreciated world of Couperin's sacred music. **Lindsay Kemp**

Handel

Acis and Galatea

Allan Clayton *ten* **Acis**

Lucy Crowe *sop* **Galatea**

Neal Davies *bass-bar* **Polyphemus**

Benjamin Hulett *ten* **Damon**

Jeremy Budd *ten* **Coridon**

Rowan Pierce *sop*

Early Opera Company / Christian Curnyn

Chandos Chaconne © ② CHSA0404

(87' • DDD/DSD)

Includes libretto



James Brydges, Earl of Carnarvon – later the Duke of Chandos – lived in some style at Cannons, his Palladian mansion near Edgware on the outskirts of London. His household included a handful of singers and instrumentalists; he also employed a

personal chaplain who was an expert on hydraulics, and it's disappointing to learn that there's no evidence of a real fountain being used as a stage prop in the open air when *Acis and Galatea* was first performed. That is a detail from the extremely informative booklet note by David Vickers that accompanies this excellent new recording.

Acis and Galatea is not an opera but it can be – and has been – staged. Taken from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, to a text probably by Gay, Pope and John Hughes, the pastoral story tells of Galatea's rejection of Polyphemus: the giant takes furious revenge by murdering Acis, whom Galatea then turns into a stream. Handel's characterisation is brilliant, nowhere more so than in the trio where the steady tread of a love duet is infected by Polyphemus raging in shorter notes – rather as Bach was to do in 'So ist mein Jesus nun gefangen' in the *St Matthew Passion*.

Handel revised the work in later life but this recording presents the original version, performed in 1718. With an extra soprano, two extra violins and an unexpected theorbo, the line-up is very slightly larger than the ensemble at Cannons; for an exact replication you need to go to John Butt's version. Christian Curnyn conducts unobtrusively in the main, which I mean as high praise. He takes 'Where shall I seek the charming fair?' at quite a lick, the dotted figures springy and precise. Oboist Katharina Spreckelsen's trill on the sustained high G in the reprise of 'Love sounds th'alarm' starts at exactly the right moment; the strings accompanying the death of Acis are suitably hushed, as they are at the end of the following chorus. Only occasionally, as in the fading away of 'Happy we!', do you feel the shaping is overdone.

Lucy Crowe is an enchanting Galatea: warm and womanly in 'As when the dove', full of tender regret in 'Heart, the seat of soft delight'. Tenderness – without regret – is the hallmark of Allan Clayton's Acis in 'Love in her eyes sits playing', and his tone is always beautiful, even in his vigorous preparation for battle. The best-known number is 'O ruddier than the cherry', with its incongruous, penny-whistle accompaniment: Neal Davies, less lumbering than some, almost makes Polyphemus a credible suitor. In this tenor-heavy cast, Benjamin Hulett and Jeremy Budd are mellifluous with, like the rest, excellent diction.

Back in 1998 Les Arts Florissants fielded a fine cast, William Christie opting for the soprano Damon and choral end to 'Happy we!' of Handel's later versions. A nearer

comparison, in both senses, is the performance by the Dunedin Consort & Players, with a splendid Polyphemus from Matthew Brook. John Butt takes 'The flocks shall leave the mountains' at a very deliberate tempo indeed. He pleasingly has 'Galatea' pronounced correctly, the third syllable as in 'tea'. Both recordings are well worth hearing but this new one by the Early Opera Company has the edge.

Richard Lawrence

Selected comparisons:

Arts Florissants, Christie (9/99) (ERAT) 2564 65988-7

Dunedin Consort, Butt (1/09) (LINN) CKD319

Łukaszewski

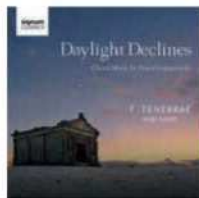
Cantate Domino. Shakespeare Sonnets.

Daylight Declines. Responsoria Tenebrae.

Lamentations. Beati

Tenebrae / Nigel Short

Signum © SIGCD521 (70' • DDD • T/t)



Hitting two anniversary targets with one release, *Tenebrae* celebrate

both the 100th anniversary of Polish independence and the 50th birthday of Poland's leading choral composer, Paweł Łukaszewski. 'Daylight Declines' is – for both good and ill – a fair reflection of a composer whose musical language is among the most instantly recognisable in the business.

At the level of the single motet or part-song, Łukaszewski's often chant-like word-setting, his episodic structures based around a sequence of repeated motifs and ostinato, and his tonal harmony – cloudy cluster-chords gently spiced with astringent dissonance – can be very effective. It's a language whose timelessness (fostered by modal harmonies, strategic use of bare fourths and fifths, and some organum-style parallel movement) lends itself well to liturgical settings. The central set of *Tenebrae Responsories* shows this off to best advantage, the penitential texts blossoming into shadowy beauty, painted with softest, smudgiest brushstrokes by Nigel Short and his fine singers.

But taken as a whole it's an album that also stresses the limitations of the composer. There's something ungainly about vocal writing that often feels like it has been conceived at the piano – awkwardly triadic and jerky in its movement – and if his instinct for language (much stressed in the booklet essay) is keen in a generalised sort of way, his settings are limited by such a narrow musical vocabulary. Gentle melancholy,

contemplation and meditation are all well served; but what about the joy we might expect from *Cantate Domino*, rhetoric that develops along with the verse's argument in the *Shakespeare Sonnets*, violence that goes beyond musical hand-wringing in the closing *Beati*?

Tenebrae, as ever, make the most of their material but whether the endeavour is worth it is another matter. **Alexandra Coghlan**

Monteverdi

'Lettera amorosa'

Et è pur dunque vero. L'incoronazione di

Poppea – Disprezzata Regina. Lamento

d'Arianna. Lamento della Ninfa. Lettera

amorosa. Ohimè ch'io cado. Orfeo – Dal

mio Permesso amato. Voglio di vita uscir

Mariana Flores *sop* **Cappella Mediterranea /**

Leonardo García Alarcón *hpd/spinet/org*

Ricercar © RIC390 (65' • DDD • T/t)



Soprano Mariana Flores's last collaboration with Leonardo García

Alarcón and the musicians of Cappella Mediterranea, 'Cavalli: Heroines of the Venetian Baroque' (11/15), earned her a place on the Recital shortlist for the 2016 *Gramophone* Awards. Now the musical team reunites, travelling back in time for a programme of music by Monteverdi.

The world isn't exactly short of Monteverdi discs by sopranos but Flores makes a convincing if rather classic case for yet another addition to the bulging catalogue. Taking us through the operatic A-Z (*Orfeo* to *Poppea*) via *Arianna*, the Seventh and Eighth Books of Madrigals and sundry other smaller works, Flores and Alarcón explore the emotional gamut of Monteverdi's music *a voce sola*. The choices may be predictable (*La Musica's* Prologue, *Ottavia's* monologue, *Arianna* and the Nymph's Laments, 'Ohimè ch'io cado', 'Voglio di vita uscir') but the performances aren't.

Flores's instrument is something of a chameleon, capable of narrowing right down to the breathiest, lightest feather-touch for the opener 'Se i languir di miei sguardi' or adding significant dramatic and tonal ballast for the *Orfeo* Prologue or *Arianna's* Lament. She's not afraid to push well beyond beauty (uncomfortably so, at times) if the drama demands, and her *Arianna* is more Sarah Kane than Ophelia in the violence of her grief-stricken madness. But where she falls short is in the delicate irony and playfulness that we find in the tension between text and vamping,

dancing rhythms in 'Voglio di vita uscir' or 'Ohimè ch'io cado' – tracks that lack the knowing irreverence we find in recordings by L'Arpeggiata or Roberta Invernizzi.

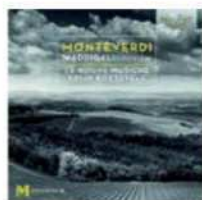
Alarcón's musicians also tend to be a little straight-faced (not to say strait-laced) in their accompaniments; but if the result lacks a little humour, a little lightness, it's a loss offset by the edgy musical drama they bring to Monteverdi's tragic stories and heroines. **Alexandra Coghlan**

Monteverdi

Madrigals – Book 5; Book 6

Le Nuove Musiche / Krijn Koetsveld

Brilliant Ⓢ ② 95659 (112' • DDD • T/t)



This is the last instalment of Le Nuove Musiche's complete Monteverdi

madrigal cycle, of which Books 5 and 6 mark out a rough chronological midpoint. Book 6 is the dark heart of the composer's output in the genre, its theme of grief seemingly endlessly rehearsed, crowned by the large-scale 'Lamento d'Arianna' and 'Sestina'. Even the optimism of 'Zefiro torna' turns inwards and deliciously anguished at the end. Book 5 is more uniform, the introduction of instruments in the final numbers looking forwards to Monteverdi's Venetian period.

The Dutch ensemble alternates a *cappella* and accompanied performance where no obbligato instruments are indicated. The tone is light, transparent and agreeable, the text intelligible throughout and the voices equal to the music's challenges, barring the odd slip of intonation and ensemble. The readings are played pretty straight as regards rhythm; not for them the elaborate play with tactus that characterises the work of their Italian counterparts. This is especially evident in Book 5, though 'Queste vaghi concetti' has a greater sense of purpose; Book 6 is a touch more inflected throughout and offers a more varied listening experience.

That being said, one cannot help calling previous performances to the mind's ear. Arianna's invectives against her faithless lover lack Concerto Italiano's controlled passion (Naïve, 8/06) or the excoriating rumination and wild changes of mood of Les Arts Florissants (whose recent miniature three-disc cycle is well worth revisiting, by the way – Harmonia Mundi, 1/15); such moments find few echoes here. More generally, repetitions of text and musical sequences that seem to shout out for a response (try the reiterations of 'beata

morte' in 'Ma, se con la pietà' in Book 5) are delivered deadpan. These are missed opportunities in a repertory that boasts as many memorable performances as this.

Fabrice Fitch

Parry

'Twelve Sets of English Lyrics, Vol 2'

English Lyrics: Set 3 – No 2, If thou wouldst ease thine heart^a; Set 4 – No 3, When we two parted^b; No 5, There be none of Beauty's daughters^c; No 6, Bright Star!^d; Set 5^b – No 2, Proud Maisie; No 5, Love and laughter; No 7, A Welsh Lullaby; Set 6^a – No 1, When comes my Gwen; No 2, And yet I love her till I die; No 3, Love is a bable; Set 8^a – No 3, Marian; No 4, Dirge in Woods; Set 9^b; Set 10 – No 2, Gone were but the winter cold^a; Set 11 – What part of dread eternity^b; Set 12 – No 5, Dream Pedlary^c; No 6, O World, O Life, O Time^b

^b**Sarah Fox** *sop* ^c**James Gilchrist** *ten*

^a**Roderick Williams** *bar* **Andrew West** *pf*

Somm Ⓢ SOMMCD270 (61' • DDD • T)



This is the second volume in Somm's three-disc survey encompassing all

12 sets of Hubert Parry's *English Lyrics* and I'm delighted to report that it more than maintains the high standards of its predecessor (12/15).

Proceedings are launched in irresistible fashion with the baritone Roderick Williams at his golden-toned, articulate best in the first three songs from Set 6 (the capricious 'Love is a bable' fairly twinkles with mischief), and he also shines in the two settings of George Meredith from Set 8 (the effervescent 'Marian' contrasting boldly with the uneasy tread of 'Dirge in Woods'). Sarah Fox brings a comparable depth of understanding and expressive reach to both 'Gone but were the winter cold' (a powerfully introspective vehicle for the soprano Agnes Nicholls) and the poignant treatment of Byron's 'When we two parted' from Set 4.

Fox is also entrusted with Set 9 in its entirety. Composed in 1908 and published the following year, these seven settings of the novelist and poet Mary Coleridge (the great-grand-niece of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, and whose death from appendicitis in 1907 had come as a great shock) represent the nearest Parry came to writing a song-cycle. There's much that is engaging in this collection, be it the melodic grace of 'Armida's Garden', subtle harmonic scope of 'Whether I live' or some splendidly evocative tone-painting in 'The Witches' Wood'. Tenor James Gilchrist

chips in with three offerings, his glowing delivery of Keats's 'Bright Star!' which concludes Set 4 yielding especial pleasure. And a final word of praise, too, for Andrew West's uncommonly deft pianism throughout.

Admirably truthful sound and balance, Jeremy Dibble's authoritative booklet essay and full texts bolster the appeal of what is a thoroughly commendable release.

Andrew Achenbach

Pergolesi

Mass in D. Dignas laudes resonemus

Marlis Petersen *sop* **Marta Fumagalli** *contr*

Ghislieri Chorus and Orchestra / Giulio Prandi

Arcana Ⓢ A444 (71' • DDD • T/t)



Pergolesi's name was unusually popular in the misattribution

stakes within only a few years of his death from tuberculosis at the age of 26. Nevertheless, here are two premiere recordings of large-scale sacred works that are apparently the real deal.

The Mass in D major seems to have been reworked in 1733-34 from a slightly earlier work by the composer. The tensions during the opening of the *Kyrie*, packed with surprising harmonies and transitions of dynamics and mood, make an ideal vehicle for the impressively disciplined Ghislieri Chorus and Orchestra. Raffaele Mellace's scholarly note asserts that 'this refined chiaroscuro of lights and shadows does not exhibit the violent contrasts of a Caravaggio, but rather the vibrant pastel nuances of Tiepolo or Correggio', although in the event Giulio Prandi's full-blooded handling of fulsome choral passages (the opening of the *Gloria*) and deft balance of gracefulness and vigour (several movements featuring excellent soloists) probably falls somewhere in between. 'Qui tollis peccata mundi' shifts from exquisite suspension-laden choral supplication to a quintet of soloists accompanied by animated strings and the limpid soprano solo 'Quoniam tu solus sanctus' is sung with ardent confidence by Marlis Petersen.

The elaborate Marian motet *Dignas laudes resonemus* exists in a few sources, including a fragmentary autograph, but required some reconstruction; extrovert choruses featuring colourful punctuation from trumpets bookend a succession of three charming arias and a duet sung adroitly by Petersen and Marta Fumagalli. At times these bring to mind Vivaldi's



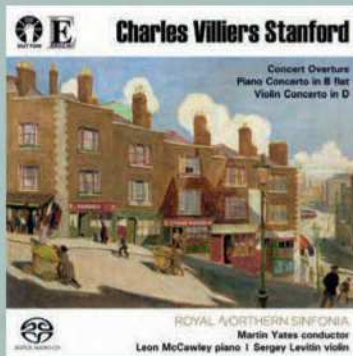
DUTTON EPOCH NEW RELEASE



2CDLX 7349

W.S. GILBERT & A. CELLIER

The Mountebanks This is a revival of a charming light opera – the “G&S” opera that Sullivan didn’t write. W.S. Gilbert’s partner in the enterprise was Alfred Cellier, music director of London’s Opera Comique, where he was experienced in conducting the nightly performances of Gilbert & Sullivan’s most successful operas. However, Cellier died on 28 December 1891, before he had finished scoring *The Mountebanks*. Ivan Caryll, music director of the Lyric Theatre, completed the work, which was first seen in January 1892, and would run for 229 performances with a provincial tour. This sumptuous recording demonstrates that this late Gilbert opera with a different collaborator is a masterpiece in its own right. Cellier’s *Suite Symphonique* (1878) is also included, the fourth movement of which would later become the overture for *The Mountebanks*. **WORLD PREMIERE RECORDINGS**



CDLX 7350

CHARLES VILLIERS STANFORD

Concert Overture, Piano & Violin Concertos A series of recording sessions in Hall One of the Sage Gateshead, with the Royal Northern Sinfonia conducted by Martin Yates plus soloists Leon McCawley (piano) and Sergey Levitin (violin), yielded this superb disc of early works by Irish composer Charles Villiers Stanford (1852-1924). The Piano Concerto is an engaging work, with both poise and a flowing solo line – brilliantly performed here by Leon McCawley – but the Violin Concerto is the more ambitious canvas, and demonstrates how quickly the young Stanford was maturing. He had intended it for a virtuoso of his time, Italian violinist Guido Papini, but in the event it was never played. In this recording, Sergey Levitin’s expressive and authoritative performance helps bring the music vividly to life. **WORLD PREMIERE RECORDINGS**



CDLX 7352

INA BOYLE

Sea Poem, Symphony No. 1 etc. This programme of music by Irish composer Ina Boyle (1889-1967), a one-time student of Vaughan Williams, collates several of her major orchestral works. The rhapsodic Violin Concerto of 1935 is in three continuous movements, and both conductor Ronald Corp and soloist Benjamin Baker interpret the music with sympathetic attention to detail, maintaining its natural ebb and flow. Boyle wrote three symphonies, and this disc presents the long overdue recording of the First Symphony, subtitled *Glencree (In the Wicklow Hills)*, which dates from 1924-27. The young cellist Nadège Rochat gives a powerful reading of the *Psalm* for cello and orchestra, written in 1927, while four short but captivating orchestral pieces complete the programme – which reveals Ina Boyle as a composer of originality and invention. **WORLD PREMIERE RECORDINGS**



CDLX 7354

EDWARD ELGAR

Short Orchestral Works Conductor David Lloyd-Jones and the BBC Concert Orchestra explore Elgar’s short orchestral works, which range, in chronological order, from Elgar’s first to last orchestral works. All of them are played in Lloyd-Jones’s newly published authentic editions – part of Volume 23 of the *Elgar Complete Edition* – and are characterised by their winning melodic allure and assured craftsmanship. They could be considered as representing the very essence of Elgar: some are tender and poetical, almost introverted, while some display an infectious, outgoing charm, and a few exhibit that extrovert boisterousness that rose to the surface so readily when he felt that the common touch was required. **INCLUDES WORLD PREMIERE RECORDINGS**

Sourced from the vaults of Sony Music, including the CBS and RCA labels, these recordings were made during the 1970s in stereo as well as discrete four-channel quadrasonic sound. These SACD reissues contain both the original stereo and quadrasonic recordings, all exquisitely remastered



CDLK 4608

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–THE CLASSIC FILM SCORES OF DIMITRI TIOMKIN



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PIERRE BOULEZ

BOULEZ CONDUCTS STRAVINSKY: PETRUSHKA & STRAVINSKY: PULCINELLA SUITE



HISTORIC • CDLX 7346

LEONARD BERNSTEIN

**BERNSTEIN’S CONCERT FOR PEACE:
HAYDN’S MASS IN TIME OF WAR
& BERNSTEIN CONDUCTS HAYDN:
SYMPHONY NO. 96**



HISTORIC • CDLX 7347

LORIN MAAZEL

**R. STRAUSS: EIN HELDENLEBEN
& BRAHMS: ALTO RHAPSODY**

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loveliest solo motets, yet elsewhere the music is unmistakably in the newer Neapolitan style, with flowing strings and telling use of a pair of economical horns ('Quot procellae, quot horrores'); the duet is a dialogue between Mary and Jesus that foreshadows the celebrated *Stabat mater*. The range of dynamism, textures and idioms constitutes a revelatory new perspective on Pergolesi's qualities.

David Vickers

Roussel

Évocations, Op 15^a. Pour une fête de printemps, Op 22. Suite, Op 33

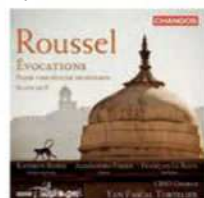
^aKathryn Rudge *mez* ^aAlessandro Fisher *ten*

^aFrançois Le Roux *bar* ^aCBSO Chorus;

BBC Philharmonic Orchestra / Yan Pascal Tortelier

Chandos © CHAN10957 (71' • DDD • T/t)

^aRecorded live at Symphony Hall, Birmingham, April 7, 2017



Completed in 1911, *Évocations* was the work that put Albert Roussel on the musical

map at its premiere a year later. The first of his scores to be inspired by his honeymoon tour of India in 1909, its three movements successively depict the caves at Ellora, the 'pink city' of Jaipur and the Ganges as it flows through the sacred city of Benares. Though it reveals a fertile musical imagination at work, it's not quite a masterpiece. Roussel's harmonic and melodic language, with its unresolved chromatic suspensions and Orientalist flourishes, is strikingly novel but not as adventurous as his 1918 opera *Padmâvatî*, in which traditional Indian music is indelibly woven into the score's fabric. The choral finale, meanwhile, setting a text by Michel-Dimitri Calvocoressi in three sections of unequal length (a love scene, a baritone aria and a hymn to the sun), comes over as episodic. Against that, however, must be set the originality of Roussel's orchestration, in which sensuality rubs shoulders with abrasion and dark-hued textures repeatedly intrude upon Impressionist transparency.

Yan Pascal Tortelier's recording, made live at Birmingham's Symphony Hall last year, marks its first appearance on disc since Michel Plasson's 1988 EMI version with the Toulouse Capitole Orchestra and Orfeón Donostiarra. Both are exceptionally fine, though Tortelier offers the more dramatic interpretation, finding danger as well as beauty in the score. The BBC Philharmonic's dark-sounding brass suggest dread as well as awe at the sight

of the Ellora caves, where Plasson is calmly majestic, and the militaristic fanfares that interrupt the chattering woodwind of the Jaipur scherzo similarly carry deeper intimations of menace in Tortelier's performance. In the final movement, he presses forwards with greater urgency and has marginally the more focused choir in the CBSO Chorus. Tortelier's soloists are every bit as good as Plasson's starrier lineup (Nathalie Stutzmann, Nicolai Gedda, José van Dam), though the Chandos recording places François Le Roux close to the microphones and Kathryn Rudge and Alessandro Fisher too far back.

The companion pieces, both encapsulating the harder-edged style Roussel adopted after the First World War, were recorded in the orchestra's Salford studio. *Pour une fête de printemps*, elegant yet dissonant, started life as the Second Symphony's scherzo before Roussel decided its length was out of proportion to the rest of the score and published it as a separate piece. Tortelier is wonderfully alert to its mercurial shifts in mood and occasional hints of violence. He drives the outer movements of the Suite in F very hard, meanwhile, only relaxing the tension in the central Sarabande with its unnerving melody that never quite goes where you expect, even after repeated hearings. The playing here is exemplary in its rhythmic precision and detail, with all those tricky brass and woodwind solos finely honed and dexterously done. **Tim Ashley**

Évocations – selected comparison:

Plasson, Toulouse Capitole Orch (9/88) (EMI) 747887-2

Schubert

'A Soprano's Schubertiade'

Blondel zu Marien, D626. Ellens Gesänge,

D837-839. Gretchen am Spinnrade, D118.

Gretchen's Bitte, D564 (compl Britten). Kennst

du das Land?, D321. Der König in Thule, D367.

Rosamunde, D797 – No 3b, Romanze. Suleika I,

D720. Suleika II, D717. Vier Gesänge aus 'Wilhelm

Meister', D877 – No 2, Heiss mich nicht reden;

No 3, So lasst mich scheinen; No 4, Nur wer die

Sehnsucht kennt. Viola, D786

Carolyn Sampson *sop* Joseph Middleton *pf*

BIS © BIS2343 (78' • DDD/DSD)



Every new repertoire frontier in Carolyn Sampson's growing body of solo

recordings – that so regularly turn up in the *Gramophone* Awards – can't help but prompt anticipation. Few singers have her combination of linguistic intelligence plus a voice with coloratura precision and a solid

core allowing the variety of colour needed over a full-disc, one-composer recital. She occasionally goes for operatic amplitude, though not nearly as often as some visitors to this repertoire. At the other end of the expressive spectrum, her partnership with the pianist Joseph Middleton shows great capacity for intimacy.

The album's title, 'A Soprano's Schubertiade', speaks of how songs are arranged to create portraits of the composer's many female protagonists, some inspired by the Goethe-authored heroines of *Faust* and *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship*. Booklet annotator Susan Youens, author of *Schubert's Late Lieder* among other studies, makes a good case for this concept. The disc doesn't include many of the usual greatest hits ('Gretchen am Spinnrade' being an obvious exception) and explores rarely heard items such as the 19-stanza saga 'Viola' – one of several selections that account for how a 78-minute Schubert disc contains only 15 titles. Don't forget that 'Ellens Gesang III' (better known as 'Ave Maria', another greatest hit) unfurls over an expansive six minutes. The ultimate question is if the disc has a place alongside the many great discs of Schubert song that are already out there. The answer is yes on a number of fronts, even though I didn't immediately warm to the disc as I did, say, Bernada Fink's 2008 recital (Harmonia Mundi).

Sampson and Middleton maintain emotional poise: the soprano doesn't take her phrase readings to existential Mahlerian depths and the pianist maintains a solid sense of musical pulse, so much that some songs are as much as 30 seconds shorter than one is used to (and that's a fair amount of real estate in this miniaturist world). When Sampson brings off a particularly well-vocalised feat, it also has considerable expressive function. When Middleton changes tempo as the music turns an abrupt corner, he uses form as a similarly expressive device. Along the way he gives Schubert's word-painting its due – but elegantly. Though the aforementioned 'Viola' isn't top-drawer Schubert, it certainly merits attention thanks to the considered cumulative narrative that Sampson and Middleton bring to the song. Other dividends include a 'Gretchen am Spinnrade' that isn't expressed in tragic retrospect but seems to unfold in real time. Gretchen is realising her plight as we listen, and doing so with a tinge of disbelief that suggests 'Could this really be happening to me?'

The following 'Gretchen im Zwinger', written rather later and left unfinished (but completed here by Benjamin Britten),

explores the deeper emotional consequences of the previous song and becomes, in this performance, something of a tour de force, though without the aid of surface histrionics. 'Der König in Thule', the third in the *Faust* series, is a bit of a letdown. In any recital, you're bound to hit a few songs that support the disc's overall concept but lack complete identification from the performers. Other real-word realities are that Sampson's vocal brightness isn't about to deliver the luxurious depths of tone you hear from Dorothea Röschmann's 2014 Schubert recital with Malcolm Martineau (Sony, 3/15) or the instinctive melancholic undertones of Fink. Also, I wish that the BIS microphones had left a bit more air around Sampson's voice. Minor complaints, all. **David Patrick Stearns**

Schumann • JS Bach

JS Bach Cantata No 105, Herr, gehe nicht ins Gericht (arr Schumann)

Schumann Adventlied, Op 71. Ballade vom Pagen und der Königstochter, Op 140

Carolyn Sampson *sop* **Benno Schachtner**

counterten **Werner Güra** *ten* **Jonathan Sells,**

Cornelius Uhle *basses* **Estonian Philharmonic**

Chamber Choir; Helsinki Baroque Orchestra /

Aapo Häkkinen

Online © ODE1312-2 (71' • DDD • T/t)



Schumann lightly reorchestrated one of Bach's most affective cantatas in 1849 for

a Dresden choral society of his own foundation. The arrangement appears never to have made it past the rehearsal stage, unlike his more radically Romantic treatment of the *St John Passion*. There is some discreet beefing up of choral textures with instrumental doublings but Schumann reserved his most telling intervention for the ever-stopped-clock beauty of the soprano aria 'Wie zittern und wanken', where he substituted Bach's obbligato oboe for a more lambent clarinet.

These performances by a Finnish period-instrument ensemble are lively and polished enough, though there's nothing especially 'period' about either the choral forces involved (a fraction the size of those envisaged by Schumann, and unfavourably recessed in this studio recording) or the anachronistic casting of Benno Schachtner's piercing countertenor. His narrative role assumes undue prominence in the *Ballade vom Pagen und der Königstochter*, written late in 1852 (just over a year before his fateful suicide attempt),

though a louring, eerie tone is not altogether out of place in this fascinating precursor to Mahler's *Das klagende Lied*, where a murder is similarly exposed at a royal court by means of a 'singing' flute.

Aapo Häkkinen usefully pulls back at the cantata's moment of awful revelation where previous recordings have heedlessly pressed on, and with a sensitivity to mood and textual rhetoric that would have served him well in some rather briskly dispatched movements of the Bach. No such comparisons are available for the *Adventlied* that here receives, somewhat extraordinarily, a first recording. 'Peace on earth and goodwill to all men' is the message of Rückert's cosy fireside poem; and shortly before Christmas 1848 Schumann followed suit in a pleasantly flowing, not especially memorable idiom pieced together from neo-Baroque gestures and counterpoint. Like the performances themselves, it's something of a stylistic salad, but attractive nonetheless and probably an essential acquisition for Schumann admirers. **Peter Quantrill**

Sebastiani

St Matthew Passion

Colin Balzer *ten* Evangelist **Christian Immmler** *bar*

Jesus **Ina Siedlaczek** *sop* **Nathan Medley**

counterten **Jason McStoots** *ten* **Jonathan Woody**

bass-bar **Boston Early Music Festival Chamber**

Ensemble / Paul O'Dette, Stephen Stubbs

CPO © CPO555 204-2 (66' • DDD • T/t)



The Boston Early Music Festival Chamber Ensemble presents the

St Matthew Passion by Johann Sebastiani (1622–83), who was Kantor at Königsberg Cathedral for a little over a dozen years before becoming Kapellmeister at the court of the Elector of Brandenburg. *Das Leyden und Sterben unsers Herrn und Heylandes Jesu Christi nach dem heiligen Matthaeo* was published at Königsberg in 1672; Paul O'Dette praises the score 'not only for the lyrical beauty of the music and the rich instrumental scoring of viols and violins used to accompany the Evangelist and Christ respectively, but also for Sebastiani's introduction of Lutheran chorales at dramatically strategic moments throughout the story, the first known use of multiple chorales in a Passion setting'.

An instrumental ensemble of two violins, four violas da gamba and continuo features prominently in sinfonias and interludes, and also accompanies recitatives for the characters of the Passion (violins without

viols when Christ sings), whereas five-part choruses are in the *stile antico*. The narrative flows with a smooth sense of theatrical engagement, with the singers (both individually and as an ensemble) and the instrumentalists meshed to each other's every musical gesture.

Colin Balzer's Evangelist is a compassionate storyteller, Christian Immmler performs Jesus's lines with eloquent authority and the soprano solo chorales are sung brightly by Ina Siedlaczek (accompanied poignantly by four-part viols). Led by theorbists O'Dette and Stephen Stubbs with a vivid emotional sweep to proceedings, the Bostonians have a clear edge over the relaxed sublimity of the Ricercar Consort's 1995 version.

David Vickers

Selected comparison:

Ricercar Consort, Pierlot (RICE) RIC280

Vivanco

Missa Assumpsit Jesus. Assumpsit Jesus

Petrum. Assumpta est Maria. De profundis.

Magnificat primi toni. O sacrum convivium.

Surge, propera, amica mea. Veni, dilecte mi.

Versa est in luctum

De Profundis / Robert Hollingworth

Hyperion © CDA68257 (71' • DDD • T/t)



Sebastián Vivanco (d1622) was a slightly younger contemporary of Victoria and one of

the last exponents of Spain's Golden Age. His footprint on the discography hasn't really borne this out so far – hence this new project, curated by Bruno Turner, the doyen of Iberian polyphony. De Profundis are here led by Robert Hollingworth and joined by William Lyons on the bajón, the forerunner of the bassoon that habitually doubled the bass line in this repertory.

The sound is instantly reminiscent of past recordings by Ensemble Plus Ultra and the Gabrieli Consort. While the Gabrielis had greater bloom, De Profundis have more presence and purpose here than on their previous project (dedicated to Bernardino de Ribera, Victoria's master at Ávila). That's because of the programme's greater variety (the Ribera disc had only motets), which gives them more scope to demonstrate their versatility, but also because Vivanco strikes me as the better composer.

Turner's notes mention the technical virtuosity of which Vivanco was capable, several examples of which appear on this disc, but he's also right to say that they are hard to spot unless one's been warned. Never mind: the 'Hosanna' of the Mass



Emotional poise: Carolyn Sampson and Joseph Middleton bring intimacy and precision to Schubert

is supremely inventive and worth the price of admission in its own, and the contrast between the two penitential motets and the brace of Song of Songs illustrates Vivanco's range most eloquently. As I've already hinted, the same is true of the ensemble – my only criticism regards the top line, which doesn't always project as strongly as one might expect given the size of the ensemble. That said, for a group of nearly two dozen they sound remarkably compact: Robert Hollingworth seems to bring the best out of them. **Fabrice Fitch**

'A Certain Slant of Light'

'Songs on Poems by Emily Dickinson'

Copland Eight Poems of Emily Dickinson **Getty**
Four Dickinson Songs Heggie Newer Every Day
Tilson Thomas Poems of Emily Dickinson (excs)
Lisa Delan sop **Marseille Philharmonic Orchestra /**
Lawrence Foster

Pentatone (P) PTC5186 634 (52) • DDD/DSD • T



As this collection and its accompanying notes remind us, the music came first and the poetry followed for Emily Dickinson. Like all respectable young American

women of a certain social standing she studied piano and voice. And the music that emerged from her studies infused her words with a rhythm and cadence – a music – all of their own. Small wonder that those words have drawn composers of every hue to her poetry. Four of those composers feature here and their choices, both in terms of the poems selected and the musical language, make for fascinating comparisons. If only their distinctive styles were more vividly reflected in the singing of Lisa Delan.

Her belief in and feeling for the poetry is not the issue here; but the archness of the delivery, the limited colours and rather generalised sound and intonation, is. One of the most fascinating aspects of this poetry lies with the apparent contradiction between their homespun 'conversational' tone and their visionary dimensions. I don't get that from Delan's performances. She has a vibrant sound, for sure, with ample heft and potential drama in the chestiness of the lower register, but her lively vibrato can muddy the words (you do need the texts in front of you) and make for an unappealing squalliness under pressure. I miss the essential purity of a setting like 'Heart, we will forget him' in the Copland group and don't ever really feel the

personality of the verse – the humour, the irony – coming through the sound.

That the five Jake Heggie settings (lovely) were written for Kiri Te Kanawa only accentuates what is missing here. 'That I did always love' is a gorgeous realisation of the poem but it longs for a more luscious tone. But again I come back to the 'archness', the rather 'singerly' delivery, which for me plays against the gently cynical and sweetly humorous informality of the verse. It's fun to compare and contrast Gordon Getty's take on 'Because I could not stop for death' with Copland's, not least his quizzical twist on the pay-off line.

Michael Tilson Thomas, too, is drawn by the irony and mischievous social commentary of the poems. Their quixotic nature. His five settings are smashing and so well attuned to the spirit of the verse. He lends a seafaring jauntiness to 'Down time's quaint stream', accentuating the imagery rather cheekily, and he has the measure of Dickinson's visionary reach in 'The earth has many keys' and more especially 'Take all away from me, but leave me Ecstasy'. Dickinson knew the true meaning of that last word.

Good to hear the way this poetry exercises a composer's imagination

and good to hear how the orchestral sonorities – as realised by the Orchestre Philharmonique de Marseille under the always revealing Lawrence Foster – can so vividly extend the reach of the verse. I just wish the singer in this instance was a more compelling and characterful embodiment of Emily Dickinson's enduring brilliance, wit and heart. **Edward Seckerson**

'The Gluepot Connection'

Bax I sing of a maiden that is makeless. *Mater ora filium* **A Bush** Lidice. Like Rivers Flowing **Delius** On Craig Ddu **Ireland** The Hills. Twilight Night **Lutyens** Verses of Love **Moeran** Songs of Springtime **Rawsthorne** Four Seasonal Songs **Walton** Where does the uttered music go? **Warlock** The Full Heart

Londinium Chamber Choir / Andrew Griffiths
Somm Céleste © SOMMCD0180 (75' • DDD • T/t)



'That bloody Gluepot' was how an infuriated Sir Henry Wood described The

George, a bustling public house just round the corner from BBC Broadcasting House and the old Queen's Hall, whose denizens once numbered many an orchestral player as well as the distinguished line-up of composers featured here. Andrew Griffiths has put together a generous and varied *a cappella* sequence, as nourishing as it is technically challenging, nowhere more so than in Arnold Bax's towering *Mater ora filium*, which receives a reading of impressive accomplishment and no mean flair, if without quite outranking Ralph Allwood's exhilarating and miraculously assured version with the youthful Rodolfus Choir (a genuine 'must hear' – Herald, 9/95). The same figure's gorgeous *I sing of a maiden* also comes off very well, and how perceptively Griffiths and his responsive group quarry the depths of both John Ireland's *The Hills* (which touchingly incorporates material from the slow movement of Elgar's First Symphony) and Walton's sublime setting of John Masefield's *Where does the uttered music go?*.

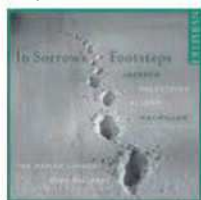
Particularly welcome are the premiere recordings of Alan Rawsthorne's *Four Seasonal Songs* (1956), and Alan Bush's *Lidice* (1947) and *Like Rivers Flowing* (1957) – the former an especially powerful creation first given under the composer's lead at the site of the eponymous Czech village obliterated by the Nazis. Elsewhere, Peter Warlock's *The Full Heart* (completed in 1916 and revised five years later) mesmerises in its penetrating harmonic resourcefulness, as indeed does Delius's

lovely *On Craig Ddu* (which so bowled over the teenage Warlock when he heard it at Eton College); Elisabeth Lutyens's sensuous *Verses of Love* (to words by Ben Jonson) enjoys superbly controlled advocacy; and it's always a treat to encounter Moeran's enchanting *Songs of Springtime* when they receive such ardent and fresh-faced treatment as here.

Excellently engineered by David Hinitt within the helpful surroundings of All Hallows, Gospel Oak, and knowledgeably annotated by Andrew Griffiths, this enterprising and imaginative Somm anthology strikes me as well worth seeking out. **Andrew Achenbach**

'In Sorrow's Footsteps'

Allegri Miserere **G Jackson** Stabat mater **MacMillan** Miserere **Palestrina** Ave Maria. Stabat mater, Super flumina Babylonis **The Marian Consort / Rory McCleery**
Delphian © DCD34215 (63' • DDD • T/t)



The opening chords of Gabriel Jackson's *Stabat mater*, their dissonant points

hammered like nails into the ear, make for an arresting opening to The Marian Consort's 'In Sorrow's Footsteps'. Commissioned by the ensemble and recorded here for the first time, this 20-minute setting is a major new work from Jackson and an unsettlingly powerful one.

Two musical modes tussle here over this emotive text. The listener is tugged between peremptory collective utterances that brush tragedy aside with brisk violence, and keening strands of individual lyricism (beautifully shaped by the consort's sopranos) that wind themselves like a silk shroud around this beautiful hymn. Portamentos trickle down from upper voices – tears running down the face of melody – and Monteverdi-style trills set the music trembling; but the voices find consolation in radiant moments of chant-like certainty. Carefully paced and shaped by the group's director Rory McCleery, this feels like a modern classic in the making, sensitive and endlessly responsive to the text.

Like James MacMillan's *Miserere*, with which it bookends the disc, Jackson's *Stabat mater* is audibly rooted in the music of the Renaissance. This shared musical language makes for a natural flow through a programme that also includes Palestrina's *Stabat mater* and Allegri's *Miserere* – Renaissance mirrors to their contemporary counterparts – as well as some shorter Palestrina motets.

The group's lean forces offer a pleasing clarity through the contrapuntal textures of the Palestrina and keep the double-choir *Stabat mater* lean and rhetorical rather than monumental. But the MacMillan doesn't respond quite as well to so severe a treatment and, despite some wonderfully free, soloistic singing from the group, never quite finds the same space and bloom that The Sixteen and Harry Christophers achieve in their more expansive account.

Alexandra Coghlan

MacMillan – selected comparison:

Sixteen, Christophers (11/11) (CORO) COR16096

'Light Divine'

Albinoni La Statera – Vien con nuova orribil guerra **Handel** Alla caccia (Diana cacciatrice), HWV79. Concerto, HWV331. Eternal Source of Light Divine, HWV74. Sonata, Op 5 No 5 HWV399 – Passacaille. What passion cannot music raise and quell, HWV76 **Rameau** Les Boréades – Entrée d'Abaris. Castor et Pollux – Tristes apprêts. Hippolyte et Aricie – Ritournelle. Les Indes galantes – Chaconne. Naïs – Je ne sais quel ennui me presse. Platée – Orage. Zoroastre – Ballet Figure and Air **Rittler** Ciaccona a 7 **Aksel Rykkvin** *treb* **Mark Bennett** *tpt*
The MIN Ensemble / Lazar Miletic
Signum © SIGCD526 (64' • DDD • T/t)



This juxtaposition of Handel and Rameau is an interesting proposition because

the soloist is the boy treble Askel Rykkvin (whose voice has since changed) and the Norwegian MIN Ensemble bridge the gap between modern- and period-instrument chamber orchestras with a pragmatic compound of both (modern strings, oboes and bassoon but Baroque trumpets, flute, theorbo and harpsichord).

Directed by trumpeter Mark Bennett, the disparate mixture of orchestral movements is sequenced engagingly. The first movement of Handel's Concerto in D (HWV331), a close relation to the *Water Music*, is played to nonchalant and vibrant effect. Rykkvin and Bennett duet with impeccable poise and judicious trills in the opening section of the *Ode for the Birthday of Queen Anne*. The gorgeous passacaglia from the Trio Sonata, Op 5 No 5, leads neatly into 'What passion cannot music raise and quell' from *Song for St Cecilia's Day*; the rhapsodic cello solo is played with whispered intimacy by Gunnar Hauge, and Rykkvin captures the fusion of Dryden's poetry and Handel's music. A hunting aria from the Roman cantata *Diana cacciatrice* is



Andrew Griffiths and the Londinium Chamber Choir present an imaginative compendium from composers who frequented the same public house

performed with infectious buoyancy. For good measure, before seven Rameau extracts, there is a precise account of a virtuoso battle aria from Albinoni's *Statira* (an opera written not for Venice, as the booklet assumes, but for the 1726 Rome carnival).

The Ramellian half is dominated by arrangements of orchestral pieces, played charismatically; Rykkvin's polished technique and confident musical personality yield a lovely account of Têlaïre's lament from *Castor et Pollux* and there is a delightful pastoral for a young shepherdess from *Nais*, in which a pair of modern cors anglais cleverly imitate a musette. **David Vickers**

'Songs of Orpheus'

Brunelli Non havea Febo ancora **Caccini**
Dolcissimo sospiro. L'Euridice - Funeste piaggie
Castello Sonata No 2. Sonata concertata XV
Cima Sonata No 1 **d'India** Piangono al pianger mio **Landi** Canta la cicalletta. T'amai gran tempo
Merula Folle è ben che si crede **Monteverdi**
Orfeo - Sinfonia; Qual honor di te sia degno; Rosa del ciel; Tu se' morta; Vi ricorda o bosch' obrosi. Si dolce è 'l tormento
Karim Sulayman *ten*
Apollo's Fire / Jeannette Sorrell
Avie © AV2383 (63' • DDD • T/t)



To build a programme of 17th-century music for tenor and ensemble around the myth of Orpheus and not include 'Possente spirto' – the hero's extraordinary Act 3 aria from Monteverdi's *Orfeo* – seems at best cheap (would some additional players for one session really have broken the budget?) and at worst wilful. It's a hole through the musical heart of this otherwise interesting programme from the Lebanese-American tenor Karim Sulayman and Apollo's Fire.

But you can always rely on Apollo's Fire (otherwise known as the Cleveland Baroque Orchestra) and their artistic director Jeannette Sorrell to do things a little differently, and 'Songs of Orpheus' is no exception. Personality rather than authenticity is the group's watchword, manifest here in textures gently thickened and adapted to accommodate the ensemble. The resulting lushness is pleasantly, indulgently transgressive but does tend to smooth the rougher edges of these emotionally charged episodes from Monteverdi, Caccini, d'India and Landi. The selection of arias and songs (broken up

with some vivacious sonatas by Cima and Castello) is one that allows us to trace the legend from the stripped-back intensity of Caccini's *L'Euridice* and Monteverdi's assured, early handling through the next generation of composers, for whom grief is secondary to a good tune (a very good tune indeed, in the case of Merula's 'Folle e ben che si crede').

Sulayman makes a pleasant, personable hero, letting the text lead the way here, just as it should, and balancing a light, agile top to his voice with a baritone warmth at the bottom. But compare this collection to similar concept-projects from Jaroussky and I Barocchisti (Erato, 4/17), Julian Prégardien and Teatro del Mondo (CPO) and, inevitably, L'Arpeggiata (Erato, 10/16), and both Sulayman and Apollo's Fire fall a little short, lacking the ferocity, the conviction to force the emotional moment to its crisis. In their hands it's Orpheus's beautiful music, not his ugly emotion, that we remember – a trade-off that doesn't feel entirely satisfying.

Alexandra Coghlan

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WHAT NEXT?

Do you have a favourite piece of music and want to explore further? Our monthly feature suggests some musical journeys that venture beyond the most familiar works, with some recommended versions. This month **Richard Bratby**'s point of departure is ...

Richard Strauss's *Don Juan* (1888)

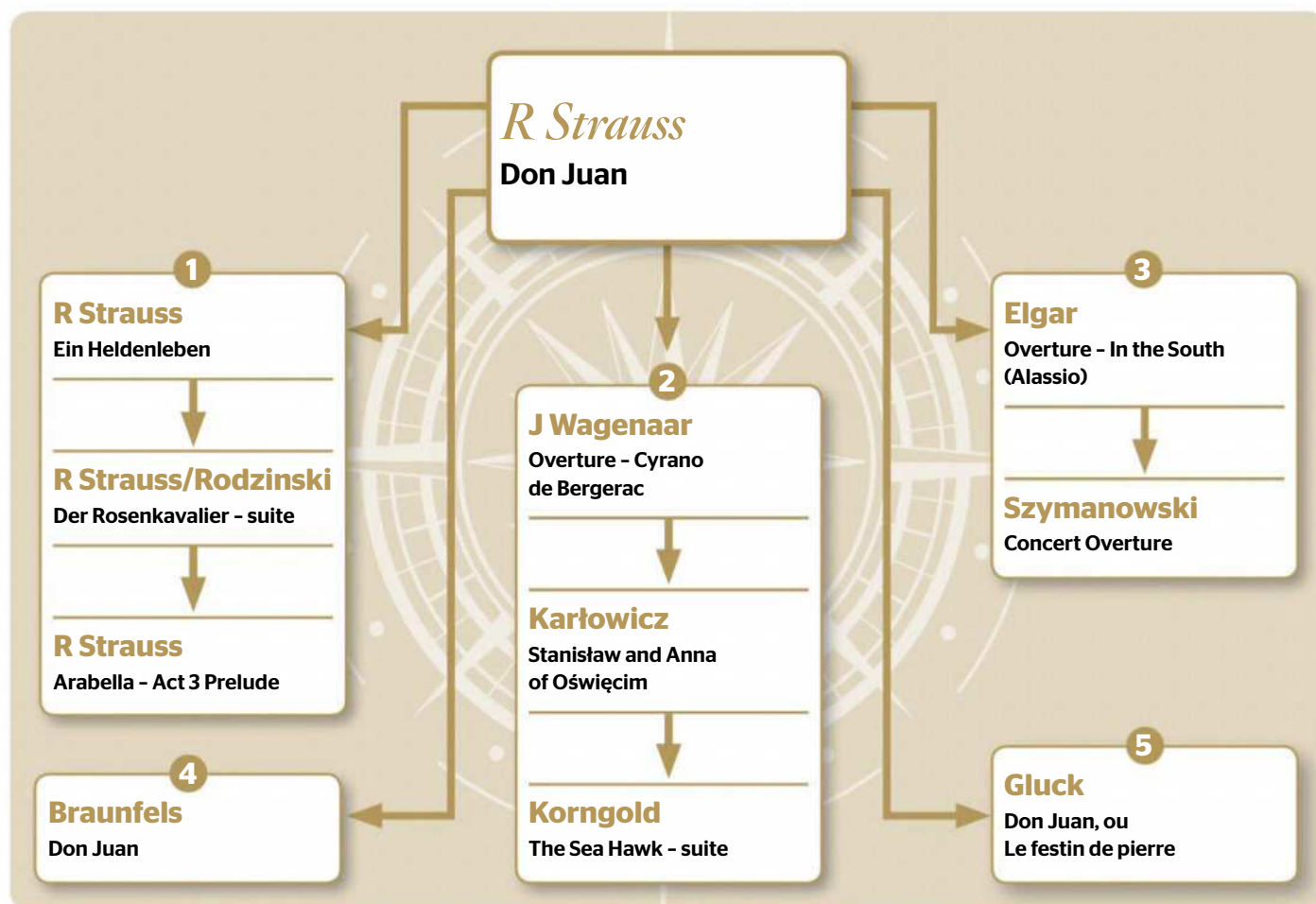
A flurry of strings, a rocketing fanfare: has a 24-year-old composer ever made a more spectacularly self-assured debut than Richard Strauss with *Don Juan*? True, this wasn't his first orchestral work, but *Don Juan* is the first time we hear, fully formed, that heady combination of larger-than-life swagger, luscious sensuality and virtuoso orchestral colour that we've come to call 'Straussian'. Strauss based his portrait of the great seducer not on Mozart's *Don Giovanni* but on Nikolaus Lenau's 1844 poetic drama, and it's easy to forget that it ends in quiet disillusion. 'Those of you who are married – play it as if you've just got engaged,' Strauss is reported to have said to

an orchestra about to perform *Don Juan*, and the critic Eduard Hanslick found it 'unintelligible, tasteless, exaggerated'. But for much of the next century, the Don's seductive powers proved hard to resist – and he's left a string of musical conquests.

● Vienna Philharmonic / Karajan (Decca)

1 *Strauss the seducer*

R Strauss *Ein Heldenleben* (1898) If *Don Juan* is the boy, *Ein Heldenleben* is the man: a decade on, this is Strauss at the triumphant peak of his orchestral powers. But when, at the height



of the central battle sequence, Strauss's autobiographical 'hero' suddenly throws off his mask of anonymity, it's with the epic horn theme from *Don Juan*. In a great performance of *Ein Heldenleben*, it can sound even more electrifying than in its original context.

● Royal Philharmonic Orchestra / Beecham (Warner Classics)

R Strauss/Rodzinski *Der Rosenkavalier* - suite (opera, 1910; suite, 1944)

There's more than a hint of Don Juan in Octavian, the precocious teenage hero of Strauss and Hugo von Hofmannsthal's Viennese 'comedy for music' *Der Rosenkavalier*. Certainly, they share a musical language: thrusting horns, breathless verve and cocksure swagger, and in the opera's orchestral prelude (possibly the most ecstatic bedroom scene in all opera), Octavian's older lover, the Marschallin, responds with the same melting tenderness and sensuous string writing as Juan's conquests.

● Detroit Symphony Orchestra / Dorati (Decca)

R Strauss Arabella - Prelude to Act 3 (1932) The lovelorn young army officer Matteo might think he's a Don Juan, but by Act 3 of Strauss and Hofmannsthal's final operatic collaboration, events are spinning far beyond his control – and unknown to him, the girl in his bed isn't even his adored Arabella. The 68-year-old Strauss summons up his stamina for one last reckless love scene: but in this bittersweet fairy tale of a Vienna in decline, he's now smiling at his youthful characters, not with them.

● Vienna Philharmonic / Solti (Decca)

2 Swashbucklers

J Wagenaar Overture - *Cyrano de Bergerac*, Op 23 (1905)

The resemblance of Johan Wagenaar's *Cyrano de Bergerac* to Strauss's *Don Juan* is as plain as the nose on its hero's face, and it'd be just as tactless to mention it. Wagenaar sets out to paint a character study of Edmond Rostand's warrior-poet (a rather more sensitive figure than the Don), and there are motifs for Cyrano's 'valour', 'his loyalty' and 'his humour', as well as his most prized quality: panache. Mahler particularly admired the result.

● Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra / Chailly (Decca)

Karłowicz Stanisław and Anna of Oświęcim, Op 12 (1907)

Strauss knew the publicity value of a hint of sexual scandal (in his music, at any rate), but in Poland the story of the incestuous and ultimately tragic love of the noble siblings Stanisław and Anna was so famous that it barely counted as controversial. Karłowicz described his 1907 symphonic poem as a 'parody of *Romeo and Juliet*', but the richness and bravura of his orchestral writing make its Straussian ancestry clear.

● Warsaw Philharmonic / Kord (CD Accord)

Korngold The Sea Hawk - suite (1940) In *fin de siècle* Vienna, Strauss declared himself 'frightened' by the genius of the teenage Korngold. The older composer provided a potent model when Korngold fled Nazi-occupied Austria for Hollywood, and from *Captain Blood* to *The Adventures of Robin Hood*, Korngold's scores for a whole series of Warner Bros swashbucklers repeatedly channel the spirit of *Don Juan*. But none, perhaps, as exuberantly as *The Sea Hawk*, which stars cinema's legendary swordsman Errol Flynn.

● London Symphony Orchestra / Previn (DG)

3 Lush destinations

Elgar Overture - In the South (Alassio) (1904) In 1902, Strauss toasted 'Meister Elgar' as 'the first English progressive musician'. It was a compliment that Elgar, snubbed by London's musical establishment, never forgot: it can't have been coincidence that his next major orchestral work – a sweeping musical panorama of the



Don Juan - the seducer of quite a few composers as well

Italian Riviera – opens with an uninhibitedly Straussian leap for joy. Elgar wasn't the type to compose sex scenes, but the sense of a composer opening a door on to glorious new vistas is unmistakable.

● Philharmonia Orchestra / Sinopoli (DG)

Szymanowski Concert Overture, Op 12 (1905) Like his Young Poland contemporary Karłowicz, the youthful Szymanowski looked westwards for inspiration – an act of modest subversion in a nation still largely under Russian rule. And how! With its six horns and multiple orchestral orgasms, Szymanowski's first orchestral work out-Strausses Strauss: his aim, he said, was to see conservative critics 'leaving the hall with curses on their blue-stained lips'.

● BBC Symphony Orchestra / Litton (Chandos)

4 Juan or Giovanni

Braunfels Don Juan, Op 34 (1924) Don Juan was around before Strauss, and Braunfels's 30-minute 'klassisch-romantische Phantasmagorie' (his description) makes it clear that he was around after Strauss as well. Scored for a full late-romantic orchestra, this *Don Juan* is, at its heart, an extravagant freewheeling set of symphonic variations on the champagne aria from Mozart's *Don Giovanni*. But that doesn't begin to do it justice, and quotation-spotters will have the time of their lives.

● Altenburg-Gera Philharmonic Orchestra / Frank (Capriccio)

5 The long shot

Gluck Don Juan, ou Le festin de pierre (1761) Before Strauss's *Don Juan* and even before Mozart's *Don Giovanni*, Gluck composed a ballet based on Molière's *Dom Juan ou Le festin de pierre* of 1665 – and in doing so, he revolutionised 18th-century ballet almost as comprehensively as he would transform *opera seria*. Dark, powerful and startlingly dramatic, his score had a far-reaching impact. The young Mozart almost certainly heard it in Vienna – and if you listen to its tempestuous final movement, you'll soon realise where that led.

● English Baroque Soloists / Gardiner (Warner Classics)

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Opera



Richard Bratby hears Alfred Cellier's collaboration with WS Gilbert:

'This is topsy-turvydom with a vengeance, and Cellier rises to it with style and charm' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 88**



Hugo Shirley on Jonas Kaufmann's Otello at Covent Garden:

'Kaufmann's voice is in good condition, with plenty of his trademark burnished tone and boneied pianissimos' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 94**

Adams

Doctor Atomic

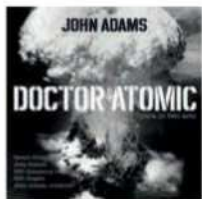
Gerald Finley *bar* Dr J Robert Oppenheimer
Julia Bullock *sop* Kitty Oppenheimer
Brindley Sherratt *bass* Edward Teller
Samuel Sakker *ten* Capt James Nolan
Andrew Staples *ten* Robert Wilson
Jennifer Johnston *mez* Pasqualita
Aubrey Allicock *bass-bar* Gen Leslie Groves
Marcus Farnsworth *bar* Jack Hubbard
BBC Singers; BBC Symphony Orchestra / John Adams

Nonesuch (M) ② 7559 79310-7 (157' • DDD)

Recorded live at the Barbican Hall, London,

April 25, 2017

Includes synopsis and libretto



Forget *Nixon in China*: *Doctor Atomic* is arguably John Adams's finest operatic

achievement to date. Dark, disturbing yet powerfully compelling, *Doctor Atomic* traces the final fraught days leading up to the testing of the first atomic bomb explosion by J Robert Oppenheimer and his team of scientists at Alamogordo Desert, New Mexico, in July 1945.

In Act 1, Oppenheimer's increasingly animated discussions with his physicist colleagues at the Manhattan Project laboratory at Los Alamos – then later with military personnel at the test site at Alamogordo – is juxtaposed with tender moments between the scientist and his wife, Kitty, where she gently chides him. Act 2 shuttles back and forth between the Oppenheims' household (represented by Kitty, her two young children and the Indian maid, Pasqualita), and the countdown to the detonation itself, which at one point is thrown into jeopardy due to adverse weather conditions. With US Army commander General Leslie Groves ordering the test to go ahead regardless of the electrical storm sweeping across the desert floor, the music wells up to a terrifying climax. In the eerie silence that follows, a lone Japanese voice is heard pleading for water in a premonition

of the devastating explosions that would destroy Hiroshima and Nagasaki only a few weeks later.

Doctor Atomic fuses the psychological intensity of *The Death of Klinghoffer* with *Nixon in China*'s large-scale dimensions. However, achieving the right balance between the two has not been easy, and previous staged productions have suffered from a lack of consistency: the drama on stage appears sometimes to have inhibited the musical flow.

This recording, taken from studio sessions conducted at Maida Vale followed by a live concert performance at the Barbican Centre in April 2017, is a revelation. Stripped of its staging, the opera's dramatic narrative is allowed to unfold through the music itself rather than through characters' actions. Gerald Finley is imperious once more as Oppenheimer – a cold, rational exterior finally exposing doubts and fears that lurk underneath, as heard in the emotionally charged 'Batter my heart' at the end of Act 1. Julia Bullock also produces an excellent, rounded performance as Kitty Oppenheimer. Cool and restrained at the beginning of her Act 1 aria 'Am I in your light?', she never allows the character to slip into caricature or exaggeration.

But it is the BBC Symphony Orchestra and BBC Singers who really stand out here. Razor sharp from beginning to end, the orchestra remain highly responsive to the work's often complex polyrhythmic patterns and pulsations, with tempo and pacing perfectly judged under the composer's own direction. The chorus is equally effective, ensuring that clarity is retained for the quieter dreamlike sections, and a measure of control applied to louder moments. The powerful, terrifying evocation of Vishnu at the end of Act 2 scene 3 ('At the sight of this') is absolutely gripping, as indeed is the performance throughout. Highly recommended.

Pwyl ap Siôn

Comparative versions:

Renes (12/08) (OPAR) DVD OA0998D; OABD7020D

Gilbert (SONY) DVD 88697 80665-9

Bartók • Poulenc



Bartók Duke Bluebeard's Castle

John Relyea *bass* Duke Bluebeard

Ekaterina Gubanova *mez* Judith

Poulenc La voix humaine

Barbara Hannigan *sop* Elle

Paris Opera Orchestra / Esa-Pekka Salonen

Stage director Krzysztof Warlikowski

Video director Stéphane Lissner

Arthaus Musik (P) DVD 109 364; (B) 109 365

(121' • NTSC • 16:9 • 1080i • DTS-HD MA5.1, DTS5.1 & PCM stereo • 0 • s)

Recorded live at the Paris Opéra, December 2015



This isn't 'a unique merging of two one-act operas' as the packaging breathlessly exclaims.

It's a decent staging of

Bartók's work followed by a poor staging of Poulenc's.

We have seen directors fade *Il tabarro* into *Suor Angelica* with distinct success but there is no such sleight of hand or narrative revelation on display here. Barbara Hannigan's Elle appears in the dying seconds of the Bartók but arrives too late to react to any of that work's narrative proceedings and is aesthetically divorced from it in how she moves and what she wears.

Beyond having a TV spool footage of Jean Cocteau's *Beauty and the Beast* during *Bluebeard* (Cocteau was Poulenc's librettist for *La voix humaine* – geddit?), no clear attempt is made to underline parallels between the two works. Emphasis on the word 'clear': while I'm sure certain individuals could conjure up complex literary-philosophical justifications and parallels, the net effect for people who turn up to an opera house is confusing and self-regarding, especially when we're given a revisionist production of Poulenc's work that misfires of its own accord. Pity those audience members at the Palais Garnier who weren't even offered the time-out of an interval.



John Relyea is a warm-voiced Duke Bluebeard alongside Ekaterina Gubanova's thrilling Judith in Bartók's troubling masterpiece

On DVD, *Bluebeard* goes well enough. The Duke as an end-of-the-pier magician luring Judith up from the stalls in the prologue sets a resonant tone and underlines the parochial horror of it all. Ekaterina Gubanova sings Judith with thrilling fortitude and strides about the stage like a harlot; John Relyea's is a warm-voiced and increasingly troubled Bluebeard who works effectively opposite her. Esa-Pekka Salonen conducts with the edge and ear for colour that you'd expect. The seventh room reveals glamorous sex slaves, alive but broken and complicit.

La voix humaine is built of entirely different stuff but despite Barbara Hannigan's compulsively agile vocal performance – Salonen is the perfect partner to her here, too – her semi-choreographed physical caricature of the woman bypasses all the mystery, pain and deception of this half-story and, in its physical semaphoring, misses almost all of its contradictory emotions. If the intention was to play it as an actual monologue prompted by psychological breakdown, then the technical references to the telephone, written in by Cocteau and Poulenc, torpedo it.

We know that sort of thing doesn't bother Krzysztof Warlikowski and, as so often, he has to superimpose a new idea to

substitute for those he has chosen to ignore. In this case, it is to have the woman's partner onstage, fatally wounded perhaps by her gunshot, lolling around the place and with a look so French it becomes a caricature too. In both pieces, much of the stage is lit or shot in such a way that makes it difficult to decipher objects that aren't in the immediate foreground. Given Warlikowski's penchant for naff, disposable symbolism, that might be a good thing. It certainly stands in direct contrast to the conviction of the musical performances.

Andrew Mellor

Berlioz

Benvenuto Cellini

John Osborn <i>ten</i>	Benvenuto Cellini
Mariangela Sicilia <i>sop</i>	Teresa
Maurizio Muraro <i>bass</i>	Balducci
Michèle Losier <i>mez</i>	Ascanio
Laurent Naouri <i>bass-bar</i>	Fieramosca
Orlin Anastassov <i>bass</i>	Pope Clement VII
Nicky Spence <i>ten</i>	Francesco
Scott Conner <i>bass</i>	Bernardino
Marcel Beekman <i>ten</i>	Innkeeper
André Morsch <i>bar</i>	Pompeo
Chorus of Dutch National Opera; Rotterdam Philharmonic Orchestra / Sir Mark Elder	

Stage director Terry Gilliam

Video director François Roussillon

Naxos ② DVD 2 110575/6; ③ NBD0074V
(3h • NTSC • 16:9 • 1080i • DTS5.1 & PCM stereo • 0 • s)

Recorded live at Dutch National Opera and Ballet, Amsterdam, May 15 & 18, 2015



Terry Gilliam's production of *Benvenuto Cellini* was the second of the ex-Python's shows to open at English National

Opera, after his *Damnation of Faust*. Here it appears as captured a couple of years later in Amsterdam – where it was performed in the original language – and there's certainly no denying the energy that the director finds to reflect Berlioz's bustling, brilliant but occasionally waffly score.

While Gilliam's *Faust* (not available on video, it seems) sought to impose a grand concept, mapping the darkest century of German history on to Berlioz's loose narrative, his *Cellini* seems happy just to tell the story – essentially of the famous artist creating his grandest statue to save himself from jail, interspersed with a conventional romantic subplot and lots of dancing and drinking and carousing. Gilliam doesn't scribble on these last elements, throwing

acrobats and puppets aplenty at the carnival scene and cramming his stage with additional elements (the sub-Python old wenches that fuss around in the opening scenes, for example) and little vignettes throughout. But it doesn't take long for all this to become wearing – not least when underlined by the camera direction – and one realises that we are given little of interest when it comes to the direction of the principal characters. The sets reflect the overly busy aesthetic, too, and Finn Ross's video projections can't hide the fact that they already seem to look a little moth-eaten and old-fashioned.

Thankfully there are some excellent musical performances, not least from Mark Elder, who brings out some fizzingly punchy playing from the Rotterdam Philharmonic. John Osborn is ideal as Cellini, too, dealing with the often stratospheric demands of the role with style, panache and a lovely command of colour and honeyed *voix mixte*. Mariangela Sicilia doesn't offer similar tonal variety as Teresa but sings elegantly and acts engagingly. Michèle Losier is a terrific Ascanio, stealing the show with her brief appearances. The lower male roles are well taken, too.

I have my reservations about Gilliam's staging, then, but Berlioz's first opera is not well served on film, and this film is certainly more recommendable than Philip Stölzl's sci-fi staging at Salzburg (also Naxos). **Hugo Shirley**

Selected comparison:

Gergiev (NAXO) DVD 2 110271; NBD0006

Bernstein

A Quiet Place (arr Garth Sunderland)

Claudia Boyle *sop* Dede
Joseph Kaiser *ten* François
Gordon Bintner *bar* Junior
Lucas Meachem *bar* Sam
Rupert Charlesworth *ten* Funeral Director
Daniel Belcher *bar* Bill
Annie Rosen *mez* Susie
Steven Humes *bass* Doc
Maija Skille *mez* Mrs Doc
John Tessier *ten* Analyst

Montreal Symphony Chorus and Orchestra / Kent Nagano

Decca © 2 483 3895DHO2 (93' • DDD)

Includes synopsis and libretto



This is a recording of a hypothetical. What if Leonard Bernstein had rewritten his opera

A Quiet Place for a third time: streamlining the plot, slashing the orchestra and severing almost all musical links to his

earlier opera *Trouble in Tabiti*, to which *A Quiet Place* had originally served as a sequel before swallowing it whole in the final, 1986 version?

Then he might have created something like this chamber version, commissioned by Kent Nagano from the composer Garth Sunderland. Sunderland has radically reworked the score, discarding some sections, reinstating material that Bernstein cut and reassigning entire arias from one character to another. It's skilfully done; but whether the result is still *A Quiet Place* is another question. That it's endorsed by the Leonard Bernstein Office is irrelevant here: this remains a version that Bernstein never authorised or even heard.

If that doesn't bother you, read on, because on its own terms it's impressive. The story – in which, 30 years after *Trouble in Tabiti*, Dinah dies in a car crash and her husband Sam and dysfunctional adult children Dede and Junior gather to confront their loss – is one of the most psychologically complex that Bernstein ever attempted. It's closer to John Updike than *West Side Story*, and although you'd never mistake this recording for a theatrical performance (the conversational exchanges by mourners in Act 1 sound stiff, and a piece of breaking crockery detonates like a hand grenade), the four central cast members are entirely inside their characters.

Lucas Meachem as Sam is the opera's heart; a performance of intense conviction that takes him from clenched, inarticulate fury to redemptive radiance. As Dede, Claudia Boyle is his polar opposite: bright and clear but capable of floating over even the busiest ensembles. Indeed, the vocal gymnastics of Stephen Wadsworth's libretto present no problems to any of the cast or chorus, whether Joseph Kaiser's warm-centred François or Gordon Bintner's volatile (but never less than musical) Junior.

And in truth, in some of the big set pieces (such as Sam's explosive Act 1 monologue, in which Meachem colours his lines almost by the word), as well as the numerous quickfire ensembles, it's possible that the slimline scoring (Bernstein asked for at least 72 players; Sunderland uses 18) might offer a musical advantage. Nagano paces it tautly and his Montreal forces play with sensitivity and style, plus an unmistakable relish for the moments when Bernstein eases into a slow waltz or a tiny hint of Gershwin or Stravinsky flashes across the score.

This was clearly a labour of love, and if it's a question of a slimmed-down, reworked *A Quiet Place* in opera houses or

(as is currently likely) no *A Quiet Place* at all, I wish it success. Record collectors don't face the same choice, and you might feel that Bernstein without the extravagance, the awkwardness – Bernstein without its heart on its sleeve – isn't really Bernstein at all. If that's the case you'll be interested, like me, to hear this for the individual performances. But the composer's own flawed yet deeply romantic DG recording (10/87) will continue to be your first choice. **Richard Bratby**

Cellier

The Mountebanks. Suite symphonique

Soraya Mafi *sop* Teresa
Thomas Elwin *ten* Alfredo
James Cleverton *bar* Arrostino
Sharon Carty *mez* Minestra
John-Colyn Gyeantey *ten* Risotto
Catherine Carby *mez* Nita
John Savournin *bass-bar* Bartolo
Geoffrey Dolton *bar* Pietro
Madeleine Shaw *mez* Ultrice
Martin Lamb *bass-bar* Elvino

BBC Singers; BBC Concert Orchestra /

John Andrews

Dutton Epoch © 2 2CDLX7349

(138' • DDD/DSD)

Libretto available from duttonvocalion.co.uk



Gilbert didn't only collaborate with Sullivan, and for many years Alfred

Cellier was an indispensable part of the D'Oyly Carte operation. He was a successful theatre composer in his own right: his operetta *Dorothy* (1886) outstripped even *The Mikado* at the box office. *The Mountebanks* (1892), Cellier's last (but not first) collaboration with Gilbert, dates from Gilbert's post-*Gondoliers* estrangement from Sullivan – and, for many listeners, *The Gondoliers* will be the first point of comparison.

The setting is rural Sicily and the plot involves bandits, strolling players and two pairs of young lovers; all for various reasons pretending to be something they're not. Cue a plot device that Sullivan consistently rejected: the 'magic lozenge' (here, a potion) that transforms everyone into the thing they're pretending to be. This is topsy-turvydom with a vengeance (one character is called Risotto), and Cellier rises to it with style and charm. His instinct is perhaps more purely lyrical than Sullivan's; choruses of monks suggest Grand Opera while there's a delightful, Offenbach-ish musical-box number for two actors who believe they've turned into clockwork dolls.

It receives a warm, polished account from John Andrews and the BBC Concert Orchestra. The cast is splendid: Soraya Mafi (as the village beauty Teresa) is one of our brightest young exponents of this repertoire, and while she phrases the score's finest item, 'Whispering breeze', with lovely poise, the sweetness of her tone has just the right, slightly tart edge for her comic numbers. James Cleverton nicely combines briskness and bluster as the bandit chief Arrosto, while John Savournin and Catherine Carby are luxury casting for the two clockwork thespians. And if the whole thing has a slightly studio-bound ambience, everyone here at least sounds as if they're enjoying themselves.

In short, *The Mountebanks* will be welcomed by all Savoyards, and it's coupled with Cellier's *Suite symphonique*: four movements of dancelike melodic lightness. Regretfully, then, I have to admit that Sullivan may have been right in rejecting Gilbert's 'lozenge plot': because, next to the delirious comic logic of (say) *The Mikado*, *The Mountebanks* sprawls – even with the spoken dialogue omitted. Parts of Gilbert's libretto are distinctly bottom-drawer ('Oh you little gypsies / Pretty pipsy-wipsies!'), as if he needed the discipline of working with his old sparring partner.

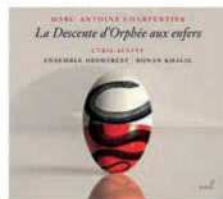
But you'll have to go online to find out, because Dutton provide neither libretto (it can be downloaded from their website) nor even – inexcusably – a brief synopsis. And they cut the overture, which happens to be the finale of the *Suite symphonique*. Since it was already in the can – and since the first disc lasts barely 60 minutes – that seems like a false economy. Dutton have done valuable work here in documenting a lost score: they should spare some thought for listeners who might want to sit back and enjoy it as a complete musical experience.

Richard Bratby

Charpentier

La descente d'Orphée aux enfers

Cyril Auvity *ten* Orphée
Céline Scheen *sop* Eurydice
Etienne Bazola *bar* Pluton
Floriane Hasler *mez* Proserpine
Mailys de Villoutreys *sop* Daphné
Virgile Ancely *bass-bar* Apollon/Titye
Jeanne Crousaud *sop* Oenone
Dagmar Šašková *sop* Aréthuze
Kevin Skelton *ten* Ixion
Guillaume Gutierrez *ten* Tantale
François-Nicolas Geslot *haute-contre*
David Witczak *bass*
Ensemble Desmarest / Ronan Khalil
Glossa © GCD923602 (61' • DDD)
Includes libretto and translation



One way or another, Charpentier's miniature opera *La descente d'Orphée aux*

enfers is incomplete: either there's a third act missing or unwritten, or the music really is all there, with Charpentier having decided to end the action at the point when Orpheus has won back Eurydice and they have yet to attempt their return to the land of the living. Whatever the case, it is first-rate dramatic music from one of the Baroque's greatest masters, and this recording from emerging Ensemble Desmarest under Ronan Khalil enters the catalogue alongside two distinguished predecessors.

The tone of the performance is set as early as the Overture, whose light and airy texture suggests that it is to be characterised by intimacy and delicacy by comparison with the slightly firmer Les Arts Florissants under William Christie and the heavier Boston Early Music Festival players (who use oboes instead of flutes) under Paul O'Dette and Stephen Stubbs. There is perhaps also a greater sense of ensemble involvement and

enjoyment in the earlier scenes, symbolised by the sweetly tinkling harpsichords and enthusiastic strumming and drumming of the dances and interludes.

But this piece must surely live or die by its Underworld scene, powerfully realised by Charpentier in a sequence of deepeningly ardent monologues for Orpheus in which the beauty of his singing is enriched by the irresistible seductive force of three bass viols. Khalil's handling is passionate and convincing; but while Cyril Auvity's clear high tenor certainly delivers the urgency of Orpheus's complaints, the hard shallowing-out of his voice in his loudest outbursts can make them feel a little petulant. While more vivid than Aaron Sheehan's Boston Orpheus, he cannot match Paul Agnew's for Les Arts Florissants, which achieves a truly Orphic synthesis of persuasive insistence and vocal control that is hard to imagine surpassed. Christie's overall handling of the drama, indeed, has a level of assurance few others can achieve, but there is life and commitment enough in Khalil's to make it a version well worth hearing. **Lindsay Kemp**

Selected comparisons:

Christie (5/96) (ERAT) 0630 11913-2

O'Dette, Stubbs (9/14) (CPO) CPO777 876-2

Gluck

Orfeo ed Euridice

Philippe Jaroussky *countertenor* Orfeo
Amanda Forsythe *sop* Euridice
Emőke Baráth *sop* Amore
Radiotelevisione Svizzera Chorus;
I Barocchisti / Diego Fasolis
Erato © 9029 57079-4 (78' • DDD)
Includes synopsis, libretto and translation



If Gluck's *Orfeo* was slow to catch on in Vienna, the city of its premiere, it enjoyed

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G. PUCCINI - JUNE 2019

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repeated success south of the Alps, though not necessarily in its original form. For a production in Parma in 1769 Gluck reshaped the title-role for the soprano castrato Giuseppe Millico (with frequent upward transpositions), simplified the orchestral palette and ditched many of the dances. Five years later this version formed the basis of a Naples production mounted for two Italian stars: Gasparo Pacchierotti, reckoned the finest castrato of the day, and the soprano Anna De Amicis, famed for her vocal agility and dramatic power. Evidently deeming that Euridice's part needed more brilliance, the theatre management jettisoned the Orfeo-Euridice duet and Euridice's aria in favour of numbers in a more modishly up-to-date style by one 'Egidio Lasnel', anagrammatic pseudonym for an aristocratic dilettante, Diego Naselli.

What we have here, then, is a slice of operatic history and something of a pasticcio. The insertion numbers – longer, showier and more generic than the music they replaced – are a stylistic misfit, compromising Gluck's ideal of 'beautiful simplicity'. Anyone who knows the 1762 original will notice that Orfeo's entreaties to the Furies are expanded and (modestly) embellished. They might miss, as I do, the otherworldly timbre of cornetto and chalumeau (unavailable in Naples) in Orfeo's opening song, and the delicate intricacy of the scoring in 'Che puro ciel'. And the omission of the final ballet makes the denouement more perfunctory than it need be.

The disc's *raison d'être* is, of course, Philippe Jaroussky, whose flutey, feminine yet powerful voice may be as near as we can get to a soprano castrato. Gluck's upward transpositions mean that the role lies perfectly for him. Singing with his customary beauty, Jaroussky is impressive in Orfeo's heroic resolve in the closing recitative of scene 2 (the Naples version divided the score into seven scenes, played without a break) and pleads eloquently with the Furies – here a duly terrifying bunch. But the grieving 'Chiamo il mio ben così' and the rarefied pastoral 'Che puro ciel', both taken briskly, sound rather too jaunty and matter-of-fact; nor does Jaroussky plumb the depths of Orfeo's loneliness and sorrow in 'Che farò', transposed up from C to D major and fitted out with trickling pizzicatos for second violins and violas – not the only alteration for Naples that weakens the original.

Amanda Forsythe lives up to high expectations as a Euridice both fiery and vulnerable. She and Jaroussky spar vividly as he leads her out of the Underworld; and she is unfazed by the high tessitura and

spitfire arpeggios of her substitute aria, cast in the (in 1774) fashionable form of a slow-fast *rondò*. Emőke Baráth, with a bright, unsoubtrettish tone, makes a sparky Amore, though for my taste she overdoes the would-be coquettish lingerings in her aria. The chorus, forwardly recorded (nice), and period orchestra, not least the first oboe, are excellent. Fasolis's up-tempo direction, at its best in the Orfeo-Furies encounter and most of the final scene, is strong on dramatic urgency, less responsive to the unearthly radiance of the Elysian Fields. At the very least this is an intriguing, offbeat addition to the bulging *Orfeo* discography. Jaroussky fans, of course, will need no prompting. **Richard Wigmore**

Handel

'Enemies in Love'

Ariodante – Volate Amori. **Orlando** – Amor è qual vento. **Partenope** – Furibondo spira il vento. **Rinaldo** – Fermati!; Furie terribili; Vo far guerra. **Rodelinda** – Dove sei, amato bene?; Io t'abbraccio. **Serse** – Troppo oltraggi la mia fede. **Tamerlano** – A dispetto d'un volto ingrato. **Teseo** – Addio! mio caro bene; Stille amare **Natalia Kawałek sop Jakub Józef Orliński** *countertenor* **Il Giardino d'Amore / Stefan Plewniak** *Évée* © EVOE005 (56' • DDD)

Includes texts and translations



One wonders how many Juilliard graduates are breakdancing

acrobats with a sideline in modelling. Nevertheless, it is the nuanced singing of countertenor Jakub Józef Orliński that is fully to the fore in a recital partnered with mezzo-soprano Natalia Kawałek and their Polish compatriots Il Giardino d'Amore. The soloists perform four arias each and join together in four duets. The closely miked small band tend to overplay in order to sound bigger than they really are and the theatrical depth and textures of Handel's orchestral writing are limited in their realisation, although concertmaster Stefan Plewniak directs from the violin with a reliable sense of pace and character.

Kawałek's exaggerated volatility, thrusting low notes and sneering vowels mean that Dorinda's 'Amor è qual vento' (*Orlando*) is bitterly sarcastic rather than vivaciously witty. Her energy is more at home as the sorceress Armida, although the inclusion of William Babbell's absurd harpsichord variations within 'Vo far guerra' is never a good idea – notwithstanding the dexterous playing of Ewa Mrowca. On the other hand,

Orliński's intuitive phrasing, sweet precision and sense of dramatic moods are consistently appealing: Arsace's tumultuous 'Furibondo spira il vento' (*Partenope*) features pinpoint coloratura and satisfying ornamentation, the defiant Tolomeo's drinking of poison ('Stille amare') showcases an apt gift for plaintive melodic simplicity (with the strings effectively illustrating the hero's consciousness ebbing away), and Bertarido's 'Dove sei, amato bene' is beautifully judged.

The contrasting duets show different aspects of Handel's art – the pick of the bunch is the chamber intimacy of Arcane and Clizia's sorrowful farewell (*Teseo*). The booklet note often gets thumbnail explanations of dramatic contexts badly wrong, and aspects of the performances are patchy, but Orliński is a talent to watch out for. **David Vickers**

Handel

'Finest Arias for Base Voice, Vol 2'

Handel *Athalia*, HWV52 – Ah, canst thou but prove me!; When storms the proud. **Belshazzar**, HWV61 – Oh, memory! ... Opprest with never-ceasing grief. **Esther**, HWV50a – How art thou fall'n from thy height!; Turn not, O Queen, thy face away. **Joshua**, HWV64 – Shall I in Mamre's fertile plain; The walls are level'd ... See the raging flames arise. **Nell'africane selve**, HWV136a. **Rinaldo** – Veni, o cara. **Siroe**, re di Persia – Gelido in ogni vena; Tu di pietà mi spogli. **Tolomeo**, re di Egitto – Piangi pur. **Concerto grosso**, Op 3 No 4 HWV315

Porpora *Catone* – È ver che all'amo intorno

Christopher Purves *bar*

Arcangelo / Jonathan Cohen

Hyperion © CDA68152 (77' • DDD • T/t)



There may not be as many showstoppers here as on

Christopher Purves's first volume of 'Handel's Finest Arias for Base Voice' (1/13). But this superb follow-up makes you wonder anew at the composer's inventive variety in writing for these assorted kings, tyrants and patriarchs. As on his earlier album, Purves's choice spans Handel's whole career, from the Italian cantata *Nell'africane selve*, with its freakishly wide range, to the sympathetic fathers Gobrias and Caleb in *Belshazzar* and *Joshua*. Along the way we have, inter alia, a suavely insinuating love song from the saracen king Argante in *Rinaldo* (a rare Handel opera where a bass gets his girl), arias for the morally ambivalent King Cosroe in *Siroe* and two moving solos for the treacherous, ultimately despairing

Haman in *Esther*. Purves even slips in a tripping *galant* aria with bassoon obbligato by Handel's London rival Porpora, sung by the deep bass Montagnana in the pasticcio *Catone*.

Purves is surely unique among today's Anglophone singers in fusing an easily produced high baritone, by turns mellifluous and incisive, with a clean, resonant bass register. Like Montagnana, he is specially adept at negotiating what an 18th-century commentator termed 'distant intervals'. The very look of *Nell'africana selve* suggests grotesquerie, with shades of the cyclops in Handel's Neapolitan serenata *Aci, Galatea e Polifemo* (cantata and serenata were probably written for the same singer). Moving smoothly between registers, Purves manages the improbable plunges and two and a half-octave range with lyrical grace, culminating in the amorous entreaty of the final aria. Here and elsewhere, characterisation is always apt and specific, yet never at the expense of beauty of tone and firmness of line. He brings an agonised intensity to Cosroe's 'Gelido in ogni veno' (belatedly conscience-stricken after ordering his son's murder) and sings Haman's entreaty to Esther 'Turn not, O queen' with a blanched, traumatised tone, gently cushioned by the Arcangelo strings.

Amid so much introspection and soul-searching, straightforward Handelian vigour is represented by sturdy arias from *Athalie* and *Joshua*, and strutting 'rage' arias from *Tolomeo* and *Siroe* – a speciality of the high bass Giuseppe Maria Boschi. Purves provides athleticism and Boschi-like venom aplenty but never merely blusters. Yet it is the slower numbers that tend to linger in the imagination, not least Purves's hushed tenderness in Gobrias's lament for his son and Caleb's sublime vision of a tranquil old age, matched by warmly rounded strings.

Ever alive to texture and subtleties of colour, Arcangelo on their own give a fresh, spirited account of one of the Op 3 Concerti grossi, with delightfully perky oboe contributions and witty variations of scoring in the final minuet. David Vickers's informative essay, placing each item crisply in context, sets the seal on a Handelian winner. **Richard Wigmore**

Mozart

Lucio Silla

Kurt Streit *ten* Lucio Silla
Patricia Petibon *sop* Giunia
Silvia Tro Santafé *mez* Cecilio
Inga Kalna *sop* Lucio Cinna
Maria José Moreno *sop* Celia
Kenneth Tarver *ten* Aufidio
Chorus and Orchestra of the Teatro Real, Madrid / Ivor Bolton

Stage director **Claus Guth**

Video director **Jérémy Cuvillier**

BelAir Classiques (F) (2) DVD BAC150;

(F) BAC450 (3H) • NTSC • 16:9 • 1080i •

DTS-HD MA5.1, DD5.1 & PCM stereo • 0 • s)

Recorded live, September 2017

Includes synopsis



It's not even six months since I welcomed Marshall Pynkoski's production of *Lucio Silla* from Milan. Now comes another DVD/Blu-ray, filmed at Madrid's Teatro Real. Where Pynkoski revelled in Baroque theatricality, though, Claus Guth – never one for excess – offers something more serious and austere, and ultimately more thought-provoking.

Christian Schmidt's revolving set presents two contrasting worlds. That of *Lucio Silla* is a place of grubby white tiles and confinement, devoid of pomp and indicative of crumbling power; that of the brave Cecilio and his beloved Giunia is all dark blue tunnels and long shadows. In Act 2 we are presented with another space, a futuristic concrete lair mildly reminiscent of a zoetrope or salad-spinner.

Having established the contrast between these worlds, Guth's most touching moments are where we sense both the closeness and distance between them. The director further enriches the action by giving us powerful sense of Silla as a troubled character – a tragic one, even – and offering a sense of the ritualistic that's reminiscent of the trials of both Orpheus and Mozart's Tamino: Giunia and Cecilia are often on stage together, but kept apart. There's no shortage of blood, and a vivid sense of the characters' desperation, of their existing on the edge of what's psychologically bearable. The final reconciliation is deeply unsettling and ambiguous, with Guth long having set the action's moral compass spinning.

It's a fascinating and demanding production, for the viewer as well as, clearly, the performers. In the title-role, Kurt Streit, a distinguished Mozartian who's turned in recent years to heavier roles, is compelling, the voice's sweetness now mixed with an extra stern virility. Patricia Petibon acts with impressive intensity as Giunia but her singing is not always easy to bear: intonation often droops and her pallid tone turns to uncomfortable yelping when faced with the coloratura demands of 'Ah se il crudel periglio'. Silvia Tro Santafé offers a terrifically sung Cecilio, though can't

match Marianne Crebassa's overall performance on the La Scala film. I was also more impressed by Inga Kalna's Cinna there than here, too; but there's one major bonus on the present film in the elegant guise of Kenneth Tarver singing Aufidio, a role cut from Pynkoski's production.

Ivor Bolton's conducting is very respectable but lacks the punch of Marc Minkowski's – or of Adám Fischer's on his (audio-only) Dacapo set. Musically things could perhaps be a bit more compelling, then, but anyone interested in the drama of this early Mozart *opera seria* should seek out Guth's fascinating staging. **Hugo Shirley**

Selected comparisons:

Minkowski (3/18) (CMA7) DVD 743308; 743404

A Fischer (A/08) (DACA) 8 226069/71

Puccini

Il tabarro

Wolfgang Koch *bar* Michele
Elza van den Heever *sop* Giorgetta
Johan Botha *ten* Luigi
Charles Reid *ten* Tinca/Ballad-seller/Lover
Janusz Monarcha *bass* Talpa
Heidi Brunner *sop* Frugola
Elisabeta Marin *sop* Lover

Vienna Singakademie; ORF Vienna Radio

Symphony Orchestra / Bertrand de Billy

Capriccio (F) C5326 (50' • DDD)

Recorded live at the Konzerthaus, Vienna,

May 20, 2010

Includes libretto and translation



The first 'panel' of Puccini's *Trittico* is arguably the closest that the composer

came to *verismo*. It's concise, unredemptive and culminates in a brutal murder, the resultant body revealed from underneath a cloak – hence the work's title. No one at Capriccio seems to have briefed their art department about the exact nature and role of the garment in question, though: this set's cover features a cloak, but it's a red velvet number worn by a glamorous blonde apparently heading to a masked ball.

The recording itself, too, doesn't quite capture for me the essence of the work. Bertrand de Billy conducts the ORF Vienna Radio Symphony efficiently and swiftly (his *Tabarro* is some three minutes shorter than Pappano's EMI account, for example). He has three soloists with healthy, robust voices. The late Johan Botha sails through Luigi's music impressively, as one would expect. Elza van den Heever conquers Giorgetta's notes with a great deal of confidence, too, in a very fine performance. Of the



Thought-provoking Mozart: Claus Guth's *Lucio Silla* from Madrid is both fascinating and demanding

principals, only Wolfgang Koch seems a little stretched.

What one misses, though, is any real sense of the drama that's at play. Koch's baritone is too smooth and avuncular. Botha's tenor, a slight metallic sheen always part of its robustness, rarely conveys much in the way of passion or Italianate warmth. Van den Heever offers only a hint of character to match the copper-bottomed vocalism. And when she launches into 'È ben altro il mio sogno', for me one of the most moving of all Puccini's duets, de Billy remains resolutely earthbound: there's little sense of imagination and longing taking flight as it should.

The live recording is decent enough but the orchestral sound lacks depth and warmth. Here's an impressive display of vocalism, with good work from the supporting cast, but you'll find a lot more passion and drama elsewhere. **Hugo Shirley**

Selected comparison:

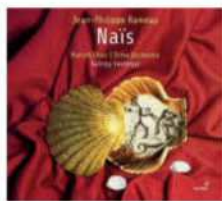
Pappano (3/99^R) (EMI/WARN) 9029 59006-3

Rameau

Naïs

Chantal Santon Jeffery *sop* Naïs
Reinoud Van Mechelen *ten* Neptune
Florian Sempey *bar* Jupiter/Tirésie
Thomas Dolié *bar* Pluton/Télénus

Manuel Nuñez-Camelino *ten* Astérion
Daniela Skorka *sop* Flore/Shepherdess
Philippe-Nicolas Martin *bar* Palémon
Márton Komáromi *ten* Protée
Purcell Choir; Orfeo Orchestra / György Vashegyi
 Glossa © ② GCD924003 (145' • DDD)
 Includes synopsis, libretto and translation



October 18, 1748, saw the signing of the Treaty of Aix-la-Chapelle, so ending the War of the Austrian Succession. This conflict, which among other things resulted in the confirmation of the Archduchess Maria Theresa's position as ruler of the Austrian lands, involved all the European powers. England celebrated in London on April 27, 1749, with a performance in Green Park of Handel's *Music for the Royal Fireworks*. Five days earlier, the premiere of Rameau's 'opera for peace', *Naïs*, was given at the Académie Royale de Musique – the Opéra – in Paris. It ran for 48 performances, was revived shortly before the composer's death in 1764, then disappeared until 1980, when it was performed and recorded by the English Bach Festival.

Naïs is not a *tragédie en musique* but a *pastorale héroïque*: not in five acts, therefore, but in three. In the Prologue, Titans and Giants storm the heavens. After their defeat, Jupiter – clearly to be identified with Louis XV – claims heaven and earth but delegates the ruling of the seas to Neptune and the underworld to Pluto. The opera proper opens with the nymph Naïs preparing to preside over the Isthmian Games held in honour of Neptune. The god himself appears but, wishing to be loved for himself, he is in disguise. Naïs is unaware of his identity until the very end, when – the rival suitors Astérion and Télénus having perished in battle – Neptune leads her happily down to his watery kingdom.

The original production must have been a splendid sight, the effects including fire, lightning, collapsing mountains and a sea battle. Here the effects are aural but no less splendid. The vigorous Overture, full of syncopation, trumpets and drums much in evidence, leads straight into the opening chorus. The divertissements do not stand alone but are incorporated into the action: there's a musical link, too, between the first rigaudon and the chorus that concludes the Prologue. Indeed it's the choruses and the dances that provide the most appealing

music, and the Purcell Choir and Orfeo Orchestra under György Vashegyi do them proud. Most of the numbers are brief, but there's a seven-minute Chaconne, moving from triple to duple time, that is marvellous in its invention and variety. The scoring throughout is delightful, highlights including a piquant combination of piccolo and bassoon in one of the minuets, and a musette (a kind of bagpipe) for the danced musettes.

The first singers of Naïs and Neptune were Marie Fel and Pierre de Jélyotte, two artists who performed in many of Rameau's operas. Their counterparts on this recording are magnificent. Each has a slow, reflective air – Naïs's 'Tendres oiseaux' and Neptune's 'La jeune nymphe que j'adore' – dispatched with tenderness; but Chantal Santon Jeffery and Reinoud Van Mechelen are no less accomplished in the Italianate runs on words such as 'éclate' or 'lancer'. Another *haute-contre*, Manuel Nuñez-Camelino is mightily impressive in the high tessitura of Astérion's 'Tendres bergers'. Add first-rate performances from the rest of the cast, including Florian Sempey, Thomas Dolié and Daniela Skorka taking six roles between them, and you have a winner. **Richard Lawrence**

Verdi

Otello

Jonas Kaufmann *ten*.....Otello
Marco Vratogna *bar*.....Iago
Maria Agresta *sop*.....Desdemona
Frédéric Antoun *ten*.....Cassio
Thomas Atkins *ten*.....Roderigo
In Sung Sim *bass*.....Lodovico
Simon Shibambu *bass*.....Montano
Thomas Barnard *bass-bar*.....Herald
Kai Rüütel *mez*.....Emilia

Chorus and Orchestra of the Royal Opera House / Sir Antonio Pappano

Stage director **Keith Warner**

Video director **Jonathan Haswell**

Sony Classical ⑤ ② DVD 88985 49195-9;

⑥ 88985 49196-9 (150' + 10' • NTSC • 16:9 • 1080i • DTS5.1 & LPCM stereo • 0 • s)

Recorded live, June 28, 2017

Extra features: The Characters in Shakespeare's Othello; Verdi's Music for Otello

Includes synopsis



Long before Keith Warner's new production of *Otello* opened at the Royal Opera House, there was concern whether Jonas Kaufmann would make his debut in the title-role as planned. Despite the performances coming at the end of an

illness-plagued season for the superstar German tenor, however, he did indeed turn up. (It was Ludovic Tézier, due to sing Iago, who didn't make it as far as opening night: the victim of some early putting-the-foot-down by Covent Garden's then-new Director of Opera, Oliver Mears.)

Reports of the opening night suggest Kaufmann displayed some nervousness in tackling this tenorial peak for the first time. On this DVD/Blu-ray, however, filmed a week later, he's on confident form. Indeed, the voice is in very good condition, traversing the role with plenty of his trademark burnished tone, honeyed *pianissimos* and no signs of tiredness. Vocally it's a mightily impressive achievement. But almost too much so: I miss the element of wildness. Kaufmann sings intelligently and sensitively but there's a sense that this is a role being expertly negotiated rather than lived. That sense is compounded by a production that offers little of Otello's otherness or nobility of spirit – of the heights from which he falls so precipitously.

Warner directs principals and chorus well but plumps for a semi-abstract modernism that is short of atmosphere: it's all predominantly dark until we get to a bedroom in Act 4 that looks like it's come out of a glossy catalogue. Costumes, including an impressive array of leather trousers for Kaufmann, manage to look both expensive and cheap. The ship that rolls on upstage at the start looks like it should be in a production of *The Flying Dutchman*. Boris Kudlička's sets are neat but sterile, though there's some striking lighting from Bruno Poet to help underline Otello's separateness, if not his otherness.

Warner also underlines the centrality of Iago as puppet-master, as director of the action, who forcibly, at one stage, places a tragedy mask on a prostrate Otello. Marco Vratogna rises to this challenge well, and the video direction shows the detail in his acting. The voice, however, is rather too rough and short on power to my ears. Similarly, I find Maria Agresta's Desdemona more moving as an actress than as a singer – I found myself returning to Marina Poplavskaya in Stephen Langridge's Salzburg production, a more moving portrayal opposite Aleksandrs Antonenko's more visceral Moor.

There are other advantages to the present release, though: Antonio Pappano's fiery and detailed conducting, the fine orchestral playing and an excellent supporting cast (Kai Rüütel's Emilia is wonderfully moving). Kaufmann's Otello is a work in progress and the production isn't what it might be but this is still a film well

worth exploring, especially at Sony's modest asking price. **Hugo Shirley**

Selected comparison:

Muti (CMA7) DVD 725008; 725104

'Archetypon'

Cherubini Médée – Du trouble affreux **Fiorè**

Pirro – Un cor più misero **Gluck Alceste** – Non vi turbate, no **Handel Admeto** – Spera, sì, mio caro bene. **Hercules** – Cease, ruler of the day, to rise.

Irene – Sì, di ferri mi cingete. **Teseo** – Ombre, sortite ... **Sibillando Hasse** Issipile – Impallidisce in campo. **Orfeo** – Fasto altero vero amore

Paisiello L'Olimpiade – Caro, son tua così

Porpora Andromeda liberata – Lo so barbari fati.

Deianira, Iole ed **Ercolo** – Se morrai per me chi resta? **Polifemo** – Sì, che son quella, sì

Mary-Ellen Nesi *mez*

Armonia Atenea / George Petrou

Dabringhaus und Grimm ⑤ ⑥ MDG909 2064-6 (63' • DDD/DSD)

Includes texts and translations



Medea, Euridice, **Alceste**, **Andromeda**: the women that people Mary-Ellen

Nesi's first solo disc might all be Classical characters but, far from the cool, marble figures of antiquity, they live and strive and suffer and (all too often) die in music that is warm to the touch, throbbing with human passion and emotion. Rich dramatic material indeed for the Canadian-Greek mezzo-soprano's solo debut.

The elaborate concept of 'Archetypon', which traces the genealogy between Classical female archetypes and the persona of the prima donna, is a thesis in the making. More importantly, though, it's also a scaffolding for a wonderfully wide-ranging, eclectic and often obscure collection of operatic arias. Nearly a century divides the disc's earliest work (Andrea Stefano Fiorè's *Pirro*, c1700) and its latest (Cherubini's *Médée*, 1797), making for some startling shifts of style and mood through this recital.

If a chronological approach might have helped us trace this process more carefully, a more thematic approach creates some exhilarating musical collisions – setting the classical balance and control of Gluck's 'Non vi turbate, no' from *Alceste* against the explosive virtuosity of Hasse's 'Sì, di ferri mi cingete' and the mercurial, proto-Romantic mood swings of 'Du trouble affreux' from Cherubini's *Médée*.

Nesi's is a bold instrument – big-boned and handsome – which is at its best in her Baroque home territory, showcasing both its power and agility. There's a wiriness



Verdi from the Royal Opera House: Jonas Kaufmann as Otello and Maria Agresta as Desdemona

though, a grainy grip, that creeps in at extremes of range and emotion that makes sense when set against the sympathetic rasp and clip of Petrou's wonderful period ensemble but which can't help troubling the legato surface of some of the later repertoire.

As a concept and a collection of (comparative) rarities, including several premiere recordings, 'Archetypon' is well worth a listen, bringing Classical drama from page to stage with vibrant musical conviction. **Alexandra Coghlan**

'Prologue'

Prologues from **Caccini** *L'Euridice* **Cavalli**

La Didone. *L'Eritrea*. *L'Ormindo* **Cesti** *L'Argia*.


Il pomo d'oro **Landi** *Il Sant'Alessio* **Monteverdi**

Orfeo **Rossi** *Il palazzo incantato* **A Scarlatti** *Gli*

equivoci in amore **Stradella** *La pace incatenata*

Francesca Aspromonte *sop*

Il Pomo d'Oro / **Enrico Onofri**

Pentatone  PTC5186 646 (75' • DDD/DSD)

Includes texts and translations



Starting with the earliest Italian operas, the prologue occupied the important

function of preparing the audience for the main business, usually by outlining the central theme of the drama and pointing up its moral message. In the case of the first court operas, which were not produced and performed in commercial theatres, prologues also served the political purpose of flattering princely patrons. All this was achieved through the song of allegorical figures, whose dramatic function had been well established by Italian theatrical practice.

For this imaginative and beautifully delivered record, Enrico Onofri and Francesca Aspromonte have assembled an intriguing sequence of prologues (where necessary adapting those with dialogues), beginning with Monteverdi's *Orfeo* and Caccini's *L'Euridice* from the beginning of the 17th century and ending with Alessandro Scarlatti's *Gli equivoci in amore*, first performed in Rome in 1690. In between, arranged in roughly chronological sequence, come three examples from operas by Cavalli and the majestic opening episode of Stefano Landi's *Il Sant'Alessio*. Later, with Cesti's *Il pomo d'oro* and Stradella's *La pace incatenata*, there is a distinct shift in the direction of prologues based on paired recitatives and arias.

Such an approach could easily have resulted in a dryly academic exercise but these richly sensuous performances are a delight as they traverse the stylistically varied terrain of the entire century. Rhetoric is the key not only to Francesca Aspromonte's singing but also to Onofri's direction. Speeds are dramatically varied even within sections; and although not everyone will favour the embellished style of the detailed instrumental interjections (particularly elaborate in the improvised harpsichord realisations), the overall effect is committed. Aspromonte brings an impressive range of vocal colour to the task, on full display at moments such as the highly dramatic reading of the opening strophe of the prologue to Cesti's *L'Argia*. While the bright and silvery tones of her upper register are prominent features, there is also much expressive use of darker and warmer tones in these fluid and flexible accounts, packed with sensitive detail, and alive to the essential unity of words, music and meaning. **Iain Fenlon**

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The Editors of Gramophone's sister music magazines, Jazzwise and Songlines, recommend some of their favourite recordings from the past month

Jazz

Brought to you by **jazzwise**

Alina Bzhezhinska

Inspiration

Ubuntu Music



From the opening delicate ripples of 'Wisdom Eye', you can tell that London-based Ukrainian harpist Alina Bzhezhinska has

forged a deep aesthetic and spiritual connection with the musical language of Alice Coltrane. On this debut collection she fearlessly tackles essential Coltrane touchstones such as 'Blue Nile' and 'Journey in Satchidananda' with a respectful sincerity that can't fail to win you over. In this, she's amply aided by a killer trio: Tony Kofi has a biting yet luxuriant tone on both soprano and tenor saxophones and a big-hearted presence in every solo he takes; drummer Joel Prime is a subtle energy, quiet yet intense; and double-bassist Larry Bartley

skilfully unfurls the heavy low-end meditations that underpin many of Coltrane's most transporting compositions. Yet, there's real innovation here too. The galloping 'Los Caballos', originally built around a squelching keyboard riff, has been arranged for harp, providing a mellower groove than the 1976 template. It's an impressive debut from a band with a big future. **Daniel Spicer**

Charles Lloyd & The Marvels + Linda Williams

Vanished Gardens

Blue Note



This is an album that is probably closer to Americana since it draws on, and is informed by, a host of vernacular American musical genres – jazz, blues,

gospel, country, folk, and rock – without pledging sole allegiance to any. What emerges is a glorious musical hybrid that owes its authenticity to Lloyd's saxophone improvisations. The introduction of vocalist Linda Williams only adds to the stylistic ambiguity – a poet, she has sung in jazz, blues, country, folk and rock settings – and lends a tough, keening edge to this music, which includes versions of her own 'Dust' and 'Unsuffer Me'. In addition, there are five instrumentals that include three new Lloyd originals plus 'Monk's Mood', and Roberta Flack's 'Ballad of the Sad Young Men'. This is music that creates its own space, is in no hurry to make its point and is what it is – music of great integrity. Guitarists Frisell and Leisz are central to its meaning, neither seeking to impose a stylistic point of view, but content to be a part of an overall whole that is gently shaped by Lloyd's saxophone. **Stuart Nicholson**

World Music

Brought to you by **SONGLINES**

Mexico: Luz de Luna

The Best Boleros from the Costa Chica

ARC Music



The 'Costa Chica', or 'little coast', is the stretch of Pacific shore that runs from south of Acapulco to the Oaxaca border, known for its Afro-Mexican population. It is the latter, together with indigenous and *mestizo* artists, that is powering the current bolero revival. For this classy compilation, five singers and bands have rearranged and perform 19 classic numbers, most of them penned by Álvaro Carrillo, the region's most celebrated crooner. Pedro Torres' sweet, soothing tenor is perfect for the emotive love songs 'Eso' and 'Demente', on which the high-register *requinto* guitar is plucked like so many heartstrings. Fidela Peláez has a slight lisp, which, combined with her

subtle vibrato, wrings tragedy from the melancholy 'Paz y Gloria'; Chogo Prudente, on 'Luz de Luna', is sombre and soulful.

It takes sublime vocalists to perform such simple, uncluttered folk songs and tap genuine feeling, and all the artists featured here do so amply. If you think of bolero as gushing and parodically pained, do give this album a hearing – raw emotion needn't mean severing roots. **Chris Moss**

Moira Smiley

Unzip the Horizon

Moira Smiley



Unzip the Horizon is a remarkable document for many reasons. First and foremost there is Moira Smiley's voice, which commands attention by virtue of its mellifluous tone, impressive range and

unflinching application. There are 14 compositions here, which describe personal journeys and convey a sense of the desperate plight, profound imagination and capacity for regeneration within the human species. Steeped in the work of early music and contemporary classical composers, such as Hildegard von Bingen, Arvo Pärt and Louis Andriessen, Smiley channels millennia-old dissonant harmonies and melodic lessons from Eastern Europe with the shape-note singing tradition of colonial-era America. A multi-instrumentalist who excels on banjo, accordion and piano, Smiley is also a skilled 'hambonist' – the hambone (or Juba dance) being an African American style of body percussion. Smiley's body serves as the most intimate and sympathetic accompanist. For all sorts of reasons, *Unzip the Horizon* is a sublime tapestry of 21st-century world music and a poetic testament to the transformative nature of singing the truth. **Doug DeLoach**

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REISSUES & ARCHIVE

Our monthly guide to the most exciting catalogue releases, historic issues and box-sets

BOX-SET ROUND-UP PAGE 101

REPLAY PAGE 102

CLASSICS RECONSIDERED PAGE 104

Belle époque gems

Richard Fairman finds much to enjoy in a 16-CD set that gathers together seven of Massenet's operas

From its headquarters in Paris, Erato has been doing a fine job of promoting French music. The centenary of Debussy's death has been the occasion for an impressive outpouring of discs. Now here is Massenet getting the box-set treatment, even without an anniversary to his name.

Seven complete operas are included, taken from EMI's archives, comprising an ideal starter set for anybody wanting to explore Massenet's tireless output. An enthusiast might regret the absence of *Esclarmonde* or *Cendrillon*, or possibly an example of the one-act operas, but the main works are here, and it is good to see *Sapho* and *Le jongleur de Notre-Dame* elbowing their way in, as many people will not have had a chance to see them in the theatre.

The recordings also chart a period of change in how French opera was presented on disc. The earliest, the classic *Manon* from 1955, is still rooted in a French company ensemble, despite the star presence of Victoria de los Ángeles in the title-role. Over the next 40 years, international casting becomes more prominent, though it is to EMI's credit that, *Thaïs* excepted, it continued to prefer French conductors and orchestras.

That 1955 *Manon* really is something special. Who else has captured the opera's light-on-its-feet elegance like Pierre Monteux with the orchestra of the Opéra-Comique? It is as if the elation of the opening night at the old Salle Favart in 1884 is still setting the champagne corks popping. De los Ángeles is touching, if a bit piercing at the top, as *Manon*. The rest of the cast, featuring Henri Legay and Michel Dens, have the style at their fingertips. Everything is a joy.

De los Ángeles turns up again, more than 10 years later, as a surprisingly effective Charlotte in *Werther*, but the company

around her has changed completely.

In place of the mercurial Monteux, we have heavy-footed Georges Prêtre, the fervid passion he feels for the music rendered in sweaty and unlovely playing by the Orchestre de Paris. The selling point of this set is Nicolai Gedda's *Werther*: sensitive and stylish, as always.

The two rarest of the operas happily come with an authentic French accent. *Sapho*, a generic 'fallen woman' opera, relies heavily on its soprano lead, sung here by Renée Doria with that fast, sharp-edged vibrato that always seemed to announce a French soprano at one hundred paces. The supporting cast, mostly names long forgotten outside France, is a favourable testament to its times, and Roger Boutry leads a performance with a distinctive Gallic scent.

As Stephen Walsh's fine new biography reminds us, Debussy once declared that the aim of Massenet's operas was to 'serve as a history of the female soul'. *Le jongleur de Notre-Dame* is the exception that proves the rule, putting on stage an all-male cast in the simplest of stories, almost like a mystery play. Alain Vanzo and Jules Bastin lead an estimable cast of French singers who make every word tell, and Boutry conducts the Opéra de Monte-Carlo orchestra.

The same spare and wise, older Massenet is encountered again in *Don Quichotte*. What could be more magical, or more fragile, than the dying knight errant's vision of the island of dreams, sung with typical restraint here by José Van Dam? There is sterling support from Alain Fondary's Sancho Panza and Michel Plasson's Toulouse forces, less so from Teresa Berganza's Dulcinée, which is strained. The star trio on Decca's rival set (Nicolai Ghiaurov, Gabriel Bacquier, Régine Crespin) offers bigger voices, bigger personalities.



Thaïs, of course, is a must for a set like this, the prime example of Massenet's much-loved combination of sex and religion. There is some sturdy singing from Beverly Sills – even if it's rather shrill – and Sherrill Milnes, but the performance is hard to love, mainly because of Lorin Maazel's bandmasterish conducting.

As with *Thaïs*, the recording of *Hérodiade* prioritises international singers like Cheryl Studer and Ben Heppner over native French style in the lead roles. That has invariably become the norm for the bigger French operas on disc, but Plasson and his Toulouse forces are back in idiomatic form, and crucially this is the only complete recording of the score, reminding us that the late heyday of studio opera sets still aspired to ambitious standards.

Four of these recordings – *Hérodiade*, *Manon*, *Sapho* and *Le jongleur de Notre-Dame* – would be my library choices, and the *Werther*, thanks to Gedda, is a contender in a competitive field. That is not bad for a multi-opera set, which also boasts very decent sound quality throughout, though not texts and translations. You don't have these recordings in your opera collection already? Here's your opportunity – and at a bargain price. 6

THE RECORDING

Massenet *Don Quichotte*. *Hérodiade*. *Le jongleur de Notre-Dame*. *Manon*. *Sapho*. *Thaïs*. *Werther*
Erato © 16 9029 56834-7

Harmonia Mundi: 60 years and counting

Lindsay Kemp enjoys the fruits of six decades of recording by the pioneering French label

Harmonia Mundi has long been a generous reissuer. 'Generation Harmonia Mundi', a pair of hefty box-sets marking the company's 60th anniversary, is more than a repackaging of gathered old releases; it's a carefully curated and informed presentation of well-filled discs celebrating particular areas of the label's legacy. The range is wide too; in addition to the core of early music for which they are best known, there is world music, Romantic song and 20th-century piano, reflecting the scope of their activities over the years.

Box 1 is entitled **The Age of Revolutions**, and covers the years from 1958 to 1988 on 16 discs. There's some rather earnest content (historic organ recordings of the kind with which HM first started out, as well as a disc of assorted chant), but the main thing here is the early encounters with some of the giants of period performance who made their names with this discerning and influential label in the 1970s and '80s. René Jacobs directs *Concerto Vocale* (with William Christie on keyboards and Konrad Junghänel on lute), lending his rather exotic countertenor to a handful of Italian madrigals and Schütz motets and a solemnly atmospheric Pergolesi *Stabat mater* alongside the assured treble of Sebastian Hennig, and showing off his mastery of early opera in excerpts from Cesti's *Orostea*. Christie then appears at the head of Les Arts Florissants, in Gesualdo madrigals (pity he didn't do this repertoire more), but also in a typically bold and stylish Charpentier *Te Deum* and juicy chocolate-drop excerpts from his 1987 Lully *Atys*. Philippe Herreweghe completes the triumvirate, heard here conducting Collegium Vocale Gent in a relaxed Bach *Magnificat*, a glowing Schütz *Musikalische Exequien*, and an achingly beautiful Fauré Requiem.

Most of these recordings, 30 years old and more, shape up well today both technically and musically, and it is a real pleasure to hear again the voices of such as Agnès Mellon, Barbara Schlick, Gérard Lesne and Dominique Visse. Two batches of songs from the sexagenarian Alfred Deller are also worth anyone's listening time; true, his voice sounds a little tired in the 1977 Dowland set with Robert



Part of the HM family: Jean-Guihen Queyras, Isabelle Faust and Alexander Melnikov

Spencer, but the Purcell selection made just weeks before his death two years later is a moving testament to his art. Sadly, the Deller Consort's 1978 recording of Purcell's *King Arthur*, though popular in its day, is orchestrally ropy and only of nostalgic interest.

These boxes will appeal to those whose interest in Baroque and Classical music is coupled with a fondness for nostalgia

For Box 2, bringing us up the present on 18 discs, HM invokes **The Family Spirit** – a recognition of the shift of emphasis in recent decades from an 'authentic' way of performing certain repertoire areas to a plurality of approaches served up by their talented stable of musicians. And what musicians they are, as able and willing to play stylishly on modern instruments as virtuosically on period ones: Andreas Staier, represented by his probingly intelligent fortepiano *Diabelli Variations*; Isabelle Faust, Jean-Guihen Queyras and Alexander Melnikov, on their own as well as together in Schumann's Second Piano Trio and the Beethoven Triple with the Freiburg Baroque Orchestra; harpsichordists Christophe Rousset (spokes from his complete Couperin cycle), Richard Egarr in Bach and Diego Ares in Soler; fortepianist Kristian Bezuidenhout, alone in Mozart sonatas and with the Freiburgers in the K414 Concerto; the Freiburgers again in Mendelssohn's *Italian* with Pablo Heras-Casado. All are excellent examples of the areas of versatile

collaboration and intelligent fresh-thinking that the early music movement has brought us to. There is also a disc devoted to countertenors Scholl, Visse, Zazzo and Mehta; another to those three distinguished ladies of the Schola Cantorum Basiliensis, Maria Cristina Kiehr, Chiara Banchini and Amandine Beyer; to the Cuarteto Casals in Haydn and Kurtág; Trio Wanderer in Brahms; and, celebrating HM's fine record in Lieder, Werner Güra, Mark Padmore,

Sophie Karthäuser and Matthias Goerne. Some of the older figures are still there too: René Jacobs's 'operatic odyssey' is celebrated in samples from operas from Cavaliere to Mozart, and his colourful Haydn *Seasons* is presented complete; and Herreweghe gives us his spiritually heartfelt *Missa solennis*. Newer voices in period performance are represented in a section from the fine Ballet Royal de la Nuit reconstruction by Sébastien Daucé and his Ensemble Correspondances, in Romantic choral songs from Raphaël Pichon's *Pygmalion*, and in *Daphnis et Chloé* and *Ma mère l'Oye* from Les Siècles under François-Xavier Roth.

On a practical level these boxes will probably appeal primarily to those whose interest in Baroque and Classical music is coupled with a fondness for nostalgia, while the lack of texts or sleeve-notes beyond interviews with label directors past and present means that it may seem an imperfect way of bulking a collection. But it contains fine and important stuff, and stands as a fitting celebration of Harmonia Mundi's achievements over six decades. **G**



THE RECORDINGS

Generation Harmonia Mundi

'The Age of Revolutions'

Harmonia Mundi © 16 HMX290 890419

'The Family Spirit'

Harmonia Mundi © 16 HMX290 892037



The Enchanted Island

Devised and written by Jeremy Sams
Music by Handel, Vivaldi, Rameau and others
1, 5, 7 September at 7.00pm

The Rake's Progress

Music by Igor Stravinsky
Libretto by W H Auden and Chester Kallman
4, 6, 8 September at 7.00pm

Peacock Theatre, Portugal Street, London WC2A 2HT

#BYOEnchantedIsland | #BYORakesProgress | #BYOSeason
www.byo.org.uk

BOX-SET *Round-up*

Rob Cowan offers a personal round-up of some worthwhile CD bargains

Mahler symphony cycles from the earlier stereo years count Leonard Bernstein and Rafael Kubelík as the prime movers. **Maurice Abravanel's** Utah Symphony Orchestra cycle for Vanguard is cited rather less often, but although it is set at a lower voltage than its better-known rivals, this musicianly sequence of performances is well worth sampling. Abravanel's 1963 recording of the Eighth, the first commercial stereo version, sounds warmer than Bernstein's LSO one from three years later – though both are pre-dated by Jascha Horenstein's wonderful 1959 stereo relay, also with the LSO (BBC Legends). Abravanel's Seventh is distinguished by some excellent woodwind and brass playing (sample the first of the two *Nachtmusik* movements), and the first movement of the Third Symphony focuses the necessary epic dimension. OK, perhaps the hammer blows in the Sixth's finale sound as if they'd barely secure a picture hook, let alone a nail in a coffin, but the middle movements are well characterised. The Seventh came out years ago on budget Philips LPs, and I retain a fondness for its balmy, laid-back demeanour, while No 4 is warmly intimate, with Netania Davrath especially charming in the finale. The Fifth has a touchingly simple *Adagietto*, but the storm-tossed second movement lacks intensity, certainly in comparison with the best of its rivals. Nos 1, 2 and 9 each convey the musical truth without making you realise just what that truth means in emotional terms – which more or less goes for the cycle as a whole, good though it is in part.

Leonard Bernstein was in many respects Mahler's natural successor for the latter half of the 20th century, a conducting composer who was his own best advocate. But he was by no means his only advocate. 'The Sound of Leonard Bernstein' brings together chipper, authentically styled and very well played performances of *Facsimile*, the *West Side Story* dances and the *Divertimento* by the CBSO under Paavo Järvi. Only *Prelude, Fugue and Riffs* threatens to lose its cool – and in that piece 'cool' is everything. Andrew Litton directs an often compelling *The Age of Anxiety* (the nimble, jazz-inflected pianist is Jeffrey Kahane). Litton's *Fancy Free* also works well, as does John McGlinn's *1600 Pennsylvania Avenue*. But when it comes to the *Kaddish* Symphony with Yutaka Sado and the Radio France PO,



the main drawback is Yehudi Menuhin's narration, recorded six months after the main sessions and, though nicely declaimed, plainly not part of the original act. The *Chichester Psalms* make partial amends, though Bernstein himself does better.

More Jewish-motivated orchestral music arrives care of Warner's excellent retrospective of 'The Erato Years' of the highly gifted viola player **Gérard Caussé**, whose songful performances often recall the heyday of William Primrose. Bloch's *Suite* for viola and orchestra and *Suite hébraïque*

The standard is laudably high – it's 'the real deal'

are among the composer's finest works, and Caussé does full justice to both. Also of note are Bach's six Cello Suites, each one interestingly preceded by an extract from a Rilke poem (read in French by Laurent Terzieff), the Sixth Suite transcribed by Caussé himself. Berlioz's *Harold en Italie* is represented both in its orchestral guise (with Michel Plasson conducting) and in Liszt's dramatic piano arrangement with François-René Duchâble, a regular collaborator throughout the set. There's an especially fine account of Mozart's *Sinfonia concertante*, K364, with Heifetz pupil Pierre Amoyal under Armin Jordan, and of the great E flat *Divertimento*, K563, with violinist Augustin Dumay (who's occasionally just a little overbearing) and cellist Gary Hoffman. Other chamber works here include the two Mozart duos with Dumay, Mendelssohn's String Quintets Opp 18 and 87 with the Viotti Quartet (memorable performances of works that are still too little known), Bruch's Eight Pieces for clarinet, viola and piano (with Paul Meyer and Duchâble) – also his Concerto for clarinet and viola (Meyer again) – as well as the Brahms sonatas, again with Duchâble, and the great *Zwei Gesänge*, Op 91, with Nathalie Stutzmann. Performing standards are laudably high

throughout the collection, and the remaining contents include music (some very little known) by Beethoven, Schubert, Joseph Schubert, Handel-Halvorsen, Herzogenberg, Hindemith, Hoffmeister, Hummel, Liszt, Reinecke, Schumann and Weber. It's 'the real deal', as they say.

Mention of **Brahms** earlier on reminds me of a useful and musically satisfying collection featuring his chamber music for strings, namely the three quartets, two quintets and two sextets, plus the Clarinet Quintet. The participating performers are the Verdi Quartet, viola player Hermann Voss, cellist Peter Buck (both founder members of the Melos Quartet) and clarinetist François Benda. The performances have both warmth and bite, with a few individual touches – such as the tiny expressive hesitations in the C minor Quartet's *Allegretto molto moderato e comodo* and the generously arpeggiated cello pizzicatos at the close of the same quartet's *Romanze*, reminding me of the classic pre-war Busch Quartet recording. In the hands of these expert players the start of the Second Quintet's *Allegro non troppo, ma con brio* recalls the triumphant opening of the Brahms's Third Symphony while the closing *Poco allegro* of the Second Sextet dances liltily with all manner of inner detail tellingly brought to the fore. Benda, who hails from a celebrated musical family, provides mellow reportage of the Clarinet Quintet's solo line, his largely vibrato-free approach contrasting effectively with the Verdi's manifest vibrancy. ⑥

THE RECORDINGS

Mahler Symphonies Nos 1-9. Adagio – No 10
Utah SO / Abravanel

Musical Concepts ⑤ ⑩ MC182

'The Sound of Leonard Bernstein' LSO / Previn
et al Warner Classics ⑤ ③ 9029 568790-8

'Gérard Caussé: Viola Legend – the Erato Years'
Augustin Dumay *vn* Gary Hoffman *vc* et al
Warner Classics ⑤ ⑬ 9029 568158-6

Brahms Quartets, quintets, sextets **Verdi Qt** et al
Hänssler Classic ⑥ ④ HC16084

REPLAY

Rob Cowan's monthly survey of historic reissues and archive recordings



Musical miracles from the 1950s

There are three available complete sets of the Beethoven quartets with the **Budapest Quartet**. Their last, in stereo, has already been reissued by Sony Classical: these are performances that convey a genuine sense of scale even though there are technical flaws to contend with here and there. Then there are the live recordings from the Library of Congress, Washington (on three Bridge sets: early, middle and late quartets) – often-imposing performances dating from various phases in the ensemble's career; less consistent soundwise than the stereo set, though well worth acquiring. But apart from various shellac recordings of individual works, perhaps their most convincing coverage of the entire cycle is that from between 1951

This is among the best complete cycles of Beethoven quartets from the period

and 1952 (also recorded at the Library of Congress, but not live). This is the one we're concerned with here, and it has been released on CD before: Op 18 first by Sony Classical then as part of the complete set on United Archives.

The line-up here is an excellent one by any standards: Joseph Roisman and Jac Gorodetzky (violins), Boris Kroyt (viola) and Mischa Schneider (cello). The mono sound both on United Archives and on this new Sony transfer is extremely well balanced, the cellist brought clearly into the frame. And even if Sony has the edge when it comes to clarity (a subtle difference, but noticeable over time), either version would likely give pleasure. A more substantial issue is the question of disc timings, this new set mirroring the original LPs in that we end up with 12 discs in comparison with the eight of the United Archives set – the latter a far preferable option in my view, even though the 'original jacket' idea of the former will tick the 'nostalgia' box for many. Still, if acquiring the best possible transfer quality is your main priority – and these

consistently sympathetic performances deserve nothing less – then Sony has to win out. I'd say that this is among the best complete cycles of the quartets from the period, outshining even those of the Hungarian and the Végh quartets, both having outshone themselves on their respective stereo sets.

From the same period as the Budapest's mono Beethoven comes a three-CD set of nine of Bach's sacred cantatas (Nos 1, 4, 19, 21, 39, 79, 105, 170 and 189) under the ever watchful and sympathetic direction of **Fritz Lehmann**. As Nicholas Anderson says in a typically perceptive note, Lehmann's interpretations may at first acquaintance seem anachronistic, certainly in comparison with the leaner textures and generally faster tempos that period-performance practitioners opt for. But like the Dutch Bach-loving maestro Willem Mengelberg, Lehmann was able to inspire his forces to perform with a spring in their step, as he does in the imposing opening chorus of *Es erhub sich ein Streit* (No 19), where the choral attack is refreshingly incisive. There are musical miracles galore here, perhaps the most moving being the soprano aria 'Wie zittern und wanken der Sünder Gedanken' from *Herr, gehe nicht ins Gericht mit deinem Knecht* (No 105). This is one of Bach's most original and striking arias, a canon between soprano and oboe with meaningfully hesitant violin tremolos which depicts the restless desperation of the sinner. Here, as elsewhere, the performance is remarkably insightful. The soprano is Gunthild Weber, with alto Lore Fischer and bass Herman Schey (who sang in Mengelberg's legendary *St Matthew Passion* from 1939). Other singers featured in this beautifully transferred collection include, most memorably, the tenor Helmut Krebs, as well as Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau and Elisabeth Höngen. The majority of the sessions involve the Berlin Motet Choir and members of the Berlin Philharmonic.

The BPO also turns up at the tail end of a distinguished seven-CD collection of Haydn symphonies and concertos with



Hans Rosbaud on the rostrum, again mostly dating from the 1950s. A copy tape of a stereo Electrola recording of the *Farewell* Symphony (No 45) was supplied to SWR for broadcast purposes, the idea being to avoid vinyl pops and clicks on air. How lucky that it was preserved – for the performance, like everything else in the set, combines elegance, vigour, warmth and an unobtrusive sense of style. Although a number of later symphonies are included (Nos 83, 87, 90, 93, 95, 96, 97, 99, 100, 102 and two versions of No 104), some of the most remarkable performances are of earlier works, the boisterous and intense *Maria Theresa* Symphony (No 48), for example, No 58 with its hopping, syncopated finale and No 65 with its similarly quirky Minuet (its 'muddled' rhythm will shock you each time it comes round). Rosbaud and his SWR players take all this and much more in their stride. The concertos include those for trumpet (Walter Gleissle); violin (Susanne Lautenbacher), harpsichord (Edith Picht-Axenfeld) and strings; the Cello Concerto in D (with Maurice Gendron), the Piano Concerto in D (Maria Bergmann – particularly good) and Leopold Hofmann's Flute Concerto, formerly attributed to Haydn (played by Kraft-Thorwald Dillo). Performance standards are consistently high and the mono recordings (only the *Farewell* is in stereo) have been very cleanly transferred.

THE RECORDINGS





Beethoven 
Complete Quartets
Budapest Quartet
Sony Classical  12
88985497062



Bach 
Nine Sacred Cantatas
Berlin Motet Choir, Berlin Philharmonic / Lehmann
DG Eloquence
 3 ELQ482 7642



Haydn 
Symphonies and Concertos
SWR SO Baden-Baden / Rosbaud et al
SWR Classic  7 SWR19056CD



The Budapest Quartet's Beethoven from 1951-52 is 'among the best complete cycles of the quartets from the period'

Leonard Rose in bloom

The **Complete Concerto and Sonata Recordings of Leonard Rose** celebrates a cellist whose consistently beautiful playing and quiet influence on his key pupils was a thing of wonder. Best known are the recordings he made as part of the Stern-Rose-Istomin Trio (reissued elsewhere) but his two recordings of Bloch's *Schelomo*, both included here – the first under Mitropoulos, the second under Ormandy – come within a hair's breadth of Feuermann (under Stokowski) for eloquence and beauty of tone, the stereo Ormandy version being if anything even more intense than its mono predecessor. Ormandy-led versions of Lalo's Concerto (again there's a predecessor with Mitropoulos), Saint-Saëns's First and the Fauré's *Elégie* are similarly alluring. Among the sonatas included are two Beethoven 'first releases', Op 69 with a notably assertive Mieczysław Horszowski and Op 102 No 2 with Leonid Hambro, who also serves Rose as a sympathetic collaborator in sonatas by Brahms (Nos 1 and 2), Schubert (*Arpeggione*), Boccherini, Sammartini, Franck and Grieg. In the case of the *Arpeggione* a later version with Samuel Sanders is marginally more subtle and includes the first-movement exposition repeat, which the earlier recording doesn't. Also included are two versions each of Brahms's Double and Beethoven's Triple Concertos, the earlier options under Bruno Walter, the later ones under Ormandy. Walter is the livelier rostrum presence, Ormandy the grand statesman, the Brahms being rather

spoiled by cavernous sound. Dvořák's Concerto is lovingly played, and if Ormandy's opening tutti is rather laboured, things improve soon afterwards. There are some Irish songs with the tenor Christopher Lynch and a wonderful Villa Lobos *Bachianas Brasileiras* No 5 with Bidu Sayão. Other famous recordings include William Schuman's *Song of Orpheus* (under Szell), Robert Schumann's Concerto (under Bernstein) and Bach sonatas with Glenn Gould. Leonard Rose offered unsullied musicianship, the sort you could happily encounter again and again with renewed pleasure and that all cellists should hear.

THE RECORDING



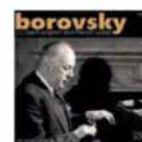
**Leonard Rose:
Complete Concerto
and Sonata Recordings**
Sony Classical (M) (14)
88985 49017-2

Bach from Borovsky

Having already welcomed William Jones's revelatory release of *Das wohltemperirte Clavier* as played by his teacher Alexander Borovsky (4/18), I was delighted that Andrew Rose of Pristine Audio had managed to track down Borovsky's Vox recordings of the *English* and *French* suites, which have taken pride of place on my LP shelves for many years. In November 1954 in these columns Lionel Salter praised Borovsky as 'an artist of the highest class', a view with which I'd concur wholeheartedly. The beauty of these performances is in their laid-back expressiveness, especially

in the case of the sarabandes, while the faster movements trip the light fantastic, occasionally stumbling over the odd ornament – but never mind, flaws are very rare and the invariable impression is that Borovsky is playing the music just for you. As to sampling, I'd start with the Second *English Suite*, where Borovsky's voicing in the fugal Prelude is all but three-dimensional. Then perhaps switch to the sullen grandeur of the Third *English Suite*'s Sarabande, where the odd arpeggiated chord betrays the pianist's vintage and pedigree. This is real artistry. With excellent transfers, it's most strongly recommended.

THE RECORDING



Bach English and French Suites
Alexander Borovsky pf
Pristine Audio mono
© (3) PAKM074

Gilels in his prime

Hänssler Profil has turned its attention to Emil Gilels with a 13-CD box that combines the familiar with the unfamiliar. There's much more of the latter in this case, especially the staggering early recordings on disc one, most notably the Liszt/Busoni *Fantasie über Themen aus Mozarts Figaro und Don Giovanni* from 1935 – playing that is in the Horowitz or Barere league. Gilels's Bach is more straight-backed than Borovsky's, more nimble than Richter's, perhaps nearer in spirit to Lipatti's serenity. An account of *Brandenburg* Concerto No 5 featuring the pianist's sister Elizaveta on the violin recalls vintage manners in Bach, the first-movement cadenza owing something to Cortot's influence, or at least that's how I hear it. A programme of 13 Scarlatti sonatas is awash with colour, whereas a live account of Mozart's Concerto No 21 with the Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra under Franz Konwitschny features one of the most forceful accounts of the finale I've ever heard. Trio performances with Kogan and Rostropovich are memorable and so are Beethoven's Concertos Nos 1 and 5 with the Czech PO under Kurt Sanderling. There's much more besides, of course, most of it well transferred and all well worth hearing. (6)

THE RECORDING



'Emil Gilels Edition 1933-1963'
Emil Gilels pf et al
Hänssler Profil © (3) PH17065

Classics RECONSIDERED



Richard Fairman and Mike Ashman discuss Sir Thomas Beecham's 1959 EMI recording of Bizet's *Carmen*



Bizet

Carmen

Victoria de los Angeles *sop* **Nicolai Gedda** *ten* **Janine Micheau** *sop* **Ernest Blanc** *bar et al*
Choruses; Orchestra of the French National Radio / Sir Thomas Beecham
EMI (now Warner Classics)

The surprise is Gedda, about whose *Faust* I was recently lukewarm. He makes Don José a very vivid character, singing with great freedom and a fuller measure of dramatic pathos than I have noted before. Beecham seems to challenge the artist in such a singer – and the results are both powerful

and moving. His French, too, is here most convincing.

The question which now cannot be put off any longer, the cardinal question, is, of course, what you think of Victoria de los Angeles? Has she, a Spaniard and a soprano, quite enough of the mezzo timbre so much of this music cries out for? The answer in my opinion is – yes. The Card Scene is not her best admittedly, she does not seem to relish the words here nor does she quite grip us with 'Mais si tu dois mourir', as (say) Supervia does. All the same it was not until that scene in Act 3

that I was anything less than delighted with her *Carmen*.

All in all, I find this *Carmen* superb and the more welcome since we have waited so long for gramophone justice to be done to Bizet's brilliant score. It is the hallmark of a masterpiece that when it is brought into contact with genius (Beecham's, I mean), it comes up as new as if poured out white-hot this very hour. This is a kind of gramophonic miracle which one never ought to take for granted. What a shock of pleasure is it when recognized.

Philip Hope-Wallace (2/60)

Richard Fairman Unlike most people at the time I came to know *Carmen* through Callas's EMI recording with Georges Prêtre. You can imagine that when I heard the earlier Beecham set it came as quite a surprise – a pleasant one, I should add.

Mike Ashman I can understand that! Whereas Prêtre follows Callas like a limpet from scene to scene, a succession of individual moments, Beecham presents the opera as one unified sweep of music-drama. And that despite having to use the unatmospheric Guiraud recitative (this was some years of course before serious *Carmen* musicology really started). But Prêtre did have a leading lady who could act out for the microphone every last colour of her part, whereas Beecham's de los Angeles has been criticised often for her lady-like restraint.

RF The question we have to wrestle with is whether we want *Carmen* to be an *opéra comique* or a French take on *verismo*. Callas and Prêtre give us very much the latter and most of the performances I remember hearing in the theatre then were fairly unbuttoned and Puccini-like, too – until

I heard Beecham, light, clear, agile and, as you suggest, presenting a suitable frame for his almost genteel *Carmen*.

MA Precisely – but I'm not sure I like it! I crave something dirtier and rougher, especially from José and Carmen. Every time I listen to the Beecham I have to re-adjust myself to its scale and tone, weighing up its right and convincing *opéra comique*-ness against that lack of 'dirt' in the principals. I guess that's in the piece though – and might have been more resolved had Bizet lived to write his own recitatives.

RF It's funny you should say 'dirtier'. That's exactly the word I was going to use about Callas/Prêtre, but I didn't like to write it!

MA OK, but I couldn't agree with you about Prêtre's part in that ...

RF Mmm. The thick orchestral sound Prêtre likes seems the 'dirtiest' part of all to me.

MA It's always clear that Beecham and his two main principals are super-experienced

at putting over a performance in the studio. Yet I want more. Listen to the Act 1 Séguedille: does it really sound like she's seducing him to let her off? I'm certainly hearing Beecham working overtime (with success) to get the detail and colour from his French strings and wind that he'd have got from his own RPO back at home. They're seducing me, but is Carmen? And at the end, the final duet, it's Beecham's shaping of it as one through-composed piece of music that builds more tension than Gedda's and de los Angeles's hurt pride.

RF I am not sure I feel the through-composed aspect of Beecham's performance as you do. For me, he is at his best when the music calls for verve or finesse – the children's chorus, the quintet, of course, but also the surging strings in the arias of Don José and Micaëla, where there is a heady rush of feeling, but still so elegant. I've never heard a period-instrument *Carmen* (come on, record companies, surely it would be ear-opening?), but with Beecham I almost feel I have. What flair the man had!



Sir Thomas Beecham with his Carmen, Victoria de los Angeles

MA Oh yes, we like to believe that flair can feel more 'French' than the French-led or -sung recordings. But do you not find Gedda and de los Angeles too noble (too refined?) to be compromised lovers on the run in the sexy heat of southern Spain? And does Ernest Blanc really cut it as a swaggering toreador? They're ultimately the reasons why, maestro aside, I wouldn't take this set to a desert island.

RF I certainly enjoy de los Angeles's Carmen, for her brightness and her ability to light up the role. Against that, I find the edge on the voice a bit troublesome and would always prefer to hear a native French-speaker, though there aren't many of those from the LP era. Of course, de los Angeles sang Micaëla as well as Carmen. I wonder how many singers have done that?

MA One perhaps surprising answer is Angela Gheorghiu who recorded both.

RF Ah, I hadn't thought of her. De los Angeles's obituary in the *New York Times* quotes her as saying that Carmen should be elegant, not crude and vulgar, adding:

'Even the common gypsy women have a pride and reserve. They stay faithful to one man at a time, no matter what. That is my Carmen.' And it was also very much Teresa Berganza's Carmen. It seems remarkable that the two leading Spanish singers of Carmen of their generation should both take that line, don't you think?

MA I think they're being too literal – and this Bizet stage *Carmen* is, after all, French through and through. But the men – Beecham's have intelligence and style certainly but don't they need to be as neurotic or sensuous as Franco Corelli, Jon Vickers or Ruggero Raimondi?

RF If you are going to buy into Beecham's *Carmen*, I think you have to take the whole package. The entire cast is of a piece, elegant, precise, suave or sensitive, as applicable. I can almost hear Beecham in rehearsals instructing them how he likes French music to go. Take the excellent Gedda, who has such grace and sensitive, soft singing at his disposal. Isn't it telling that he is one type of Don José for

Beecham, but another alongside Callas for Prêtre?

MA All right, I yield to your inescapable musical logic and I'll stop trying to make a sex, sweat and cigarettes circle out of Beecham's elegant square (or *place*). Try another tack – can you live really, in historically informed 2018, with this horrible 'edition' of the score?

RF I don't love the sung recitatives. Every time they start up the effect seems so lumberingly heavy. But let me throw the question back at you. In the recitatives, as elsewhere, isn't it a plus that we have an almost wholly French cast and can hear what is being sung? As I was listening to Ernest Blanc's debonair way with the Toreador's song – of course, he sounds as if he is promenading down the Champs-Élysées, but never mind – I realised it was the first time I had actually taken in what Escamillo is singing.

MA Can you be 'almost wholly French' with an English conductor, a Spanish/Catalan Carmen and a Swedish José? OK, smaller parts, chorus and orchestra do bring an overall French feel. However, I think hearing what is being sung – and I agree you do, wonderfully, here – is due to Beecham and the balances he always insisted on getting in his opera performances, deliberate policy rather than happenstance or engineering at the desk. I love your Champs-Élysées image but to me that suggests all too accurately what happens to Escamillo's character here: nothing.

RF I find this a tricky one to weigh up. For a 'classic' recording I would ideally want an orchestra of more class than we get here, and yet the irresistible, *opéra-comique* sparkle of this recording has spoiled me for all the pseudo-*verismo* performances that have come along since. I can't think of another recording of *Carmen* that I would rather hear than this one. Now, if I were a superstitious type who liked to tell the future by reading the cards, I think I could predict that you aren't going to go for it.

MA I'm afraid I don't.

RF I thought so. As Carmen says, 'the cards never lie'!

MA For me this set will remain a splendid late triumph from the podium by an artist who should have been allowed to record far, far more opera; for its cast and musical text I can do better elsewhere. **G**

Books



Nigel Simeone immerses himself in a trio of anniversary Bernstein books:

'While Bernstein had many passionate entanglements and many moments of doubt, for most of his married life, family came first'

Leonard Bernstein

By Paul R Laird

Reaktion Books, PB, 212pp, £11.99

ISBN 978-1-78023-901-1

Leonard Bernstein

By Humphrey Burton

Faber & Faber, PB, 594pp, £14.99

ISBN 978-0-571-33793-4

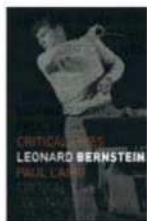
On the Road and Off the Record with Leonard Bernstein

My Years with the Exasperating Genius

By Charlie Harmon

Imagine Books, HB, 272pp, £19.99

ISBN 978-1-623-54527-7



A new biography of Leonard Bernstein inevitably runs into some tough competition, but Paul Laird has been working on Bernstein for decades and his long immersion in the subject shows through in this book. Laird's MA thesis in 1982 was a pioneering study of the influence of Copland on Bernstein that included an interview with Bernstein in an appendix. Since then he has written a book on the *Chichester Psalms* (2010) and co-written *Leonard Bernstein: A Research and Information Guide* (2015). He is as well placed as anyone to write a new study of Bernstein's life and work.

The present book, in Reaktion's series *Critical Lives*, gives a concise, clear-headed account of an immensely charismatic musician whose personal life Laird describes as 'difficult and messy'. The toughest imaginable competition for any new Bernstein biography comes from Humphrey Burton's definitive *Leonard Bernstein*, first published in 1994 and now reissued. That stands as a model (and an invaluable source) for any serious work on Bernstein that has appeared since. Laird acknowledges that Burton's book 'remains the most detailed story of the man's life and work', but, on a smaller scale, he brings plenty of his own ideas to the task and as a result there is a lot to enjoy in Laird's book.

His success is achieved through lucid presentation (sub-headings divide longer chapters into sections which take particular facets of Bernstein's work during given points in his career) and through a depth of knowledge – lightly worn – from which to evaluate Bernstein's achievements.

Chapter 3 of Laird's book is a good case in point of how so much is said with such economy of space. Covering the years 1943–51, it goes from Bernstein's appointment as Assistant Conductor of the New York Philharmonic to his marriage in 1951. Subsections are devoted to pithy commentaries on *Fancy Free* and *On the Town*, the New York City Symphony Orchestra (very much the poor relation to the Philharmonic – particularly in terms of funding – when Bernstein took it over in 1945), 'Bernstein in Palestine', his impossibly busy schedule of guest conducting, an examination of 'Compositions Major and Minor' that includes a helpful discussion of the Second Symphony, *The Age of Anxiety*, and finally 'A Change of Life', his marriage – after years of worry and indecision – to Felicia Montealegre. This is a great deal to cram into 28 pages (the same years in Burton's book take up 95 pages), but Laird picks out most of the biographical essentials and discusses the music with clarity and a welcome lack of jargon. In Chapter 6, he is similarly successful in describing the genesis and composition of *Mass*.

Bernstein's conflicted sexuality – the main reason for the on-off engagement to Felicia – is well handled by Laird, who summarises his thoughts in the chapter covering the breakdown of Bernstein's marriage in 1976 and the death of Felicia two years later: 'Sexuality was a powerful force in this complex man. He was unable to remain loyal to Felicia in a traditional manner, but she had always been a sort of anchor, providing the home and family that Bernstein craved, and perhaps also giving him the front that he need to pursue his career. His homosexuality was difficult for him.' This neatly encapsulates the issue and though Laird always deals with Bernstein's personal relationships clearly and honestly,



he doesn't let the question of Bernstein's sexuality overwhelm the narrative, and nor does he downplay the central importance of Bernstein's family in his private life. The evidence from Bernstein's letters is that while he had many passionate entanglements and many moments of doubt, for most of his married life, family came first. Laird is equally deft in handling the importance of Bernstein's Jewish faith and the impact it had on a great many of his works.

During his years at the New York Philharmonic, Bernstein's reputation as a conductor was often undermined by the relentless sniping of Harold C Schonberg in the *New York Times*. Laird gives a useful précis of Schonberg's hostility, and gives a good impression of Bernstein's innovative programming with the orchestra. Had space permitted, I'm sure he would have included some of the more positive critical views of this period in Bernstein's conducting career. Having said that, Laird's avoidance of hagiography is admirable, and perhaps he feels (with good reason) that the best of the recordings from these years provide ample evidence on their own, notably Bernstein's first Mahler cycle, his recordings from the 1960s of Stravinsky, Copland, Ives and much else besides. The extremely selective discography in Laird's book is one of its few weaknesses: given Bernstein's vast recorded legacy I would have preferred an essay evaluating some

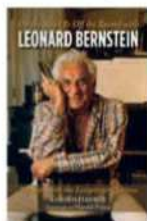


Leonard Bernstein and his wife Felicia playing pianos at home in the company of their children Alexander (far left) and Jamie

of the most interesting recordings. Even so, for a compact, objective and well-informed assessment of Bernstein, I would certainly recommend Laird's book.



Humphrey Burton's monumental biography may well already be familiar to readers, but even so the arrival of a very reasonably priced reissue is cause for rejoicing, especially as it comes with a new introduction that provides a valuable survey of writings on Bernstein since its first appearance in 1994. Burton's scrupulous attention to detail, the richness of the documentation he provides and the author's ability to bring to life the character of his brilliant but sometimes bewildering subject makes his book indispensable for anyone with a serious interest in Bernstein, whether as composer, conductor, educator or human being.



One of the new books mentioned in Burton's introduction is Charlie Harmon's *On the Road and Off the Record with Leonard Bernstein*, subtitled *My Years with the Exasperating Genius*. Harmon worked as Bernstein's assistant for four years in the early 1980s and later edited several of his major works (it is

thanks to Harmon's editorial work that we have the published full scores of *West Side Story* and *Candide*). This vastly entertaining, sometimes very funny, sometimes poignant memoir gives a wonderfully authentic flavour of Harmon's life as part of Bernstein's entourage at a time when the conductor was at the height of his international fame, but when his personal life was in some disarray after the death of his wife Felicia.

After Harmon was hired in 1982 by Harry Kraut, Bernstein's manager, his first task was to work with Bernstein in Indiana on the opera *A Quiet Place*. It quickly became apparent that Harmon's new job involved plenty that was not musical – not least an endless round of packing and unpacking Bernstein's luggage. His first encounter with Bernstein was unpromising: 'From my spot at the foot of the stairs, I took in this diminutive, decidedly derelict geriatric cocooned in an enormous white parka. Mr Bernstein made an inordinate amount of noise ... Despite the deep tan on his face, Mr Bernstein looked terrible: shrivelled and wizened and wildly unkempt.' As well as domestic duties, Harmon soon got down to some musical work, making piano reductions of scenes from *A Quiet Place* from Bernstein's handwritten short score. Bernstein's comments on the end result were helpful: 'to the point, charitable, and encouraging'.

Back in New York, Harmon was given an office in the Bernstein apartment at the Dakota and came to realise that there were far too many distractions in Bernstein's daily life, and a loss of focus since Felicia's death: 'LB's life should have revolved around music, family and friends, but many unattended details wasted his time. Julia [Vega, his housekeeper] tried valiantly to keep LB's shirt buttons sewn on, but that was something his wife, Felicia, used to do. Like the interior of his medicine bag, the people around LB were a jumble of seemingly random helpers.' Harmon's arrival had coincided with Bernstein trying to come to terms with Felicia's death: 'LB was still deeply grieving over Felicia, acting out his loss with bouts of fury and bratty behaviour, and, as far as I could tell, he hadn't put his life back together yet.' When Bernstein could focus on music, his spirits rose. Harmon recalled that two weeks working with the New York Philharmonic showed him at his best, sticking to a routine and arriving on time.

British readers will certainly be interested by Chapter 11, in which Harmon recalls the visit to London that included the performance and recording of Elgar's *Enigma Variations*. Bernstein arrived 45 minutes late for the (filmed) rehearsal with the BBC Symphony Orchestra at White City, the increasingly fractious musicians waiting under hot television lights. Rather than rehearsing straight away, Bernstein launched into a monologue on Elgar and Bernstein's thoughts on the hidden theme (he was convinced by the 'Auld lang syne' theory). Tempers were short, but Bernstein did little to help matters: 'The studio lights got hotter the longer this unhinged lecture went on.' The unending round of international travel took its toll and Bernstein often felt overworked, pushed by his manager Harry Kraut (a man who emerges as manipulative and devious) into doing things he didn't want to do. After a day listening to tapes, Harmon recalled that 'at the dinner break, LB launched into a tirade on how much of his time was taken up in recording projects just to pay the bills. [His son] Alexander Bernstein ... observed that LB was the employee of a family-run corporation – not what he wanted to hear. Angry and hurt, he threw a dinner roll at Alexander and stalked back to his studio.' Harmon has good stories to tell about projects like the complete *West Side Story* recording, as well as an extremely touching account of his last visit to Bernstein on his deathbed. It's a book that is both sharp and affectionate, and a terrific first-hand account of four years spent with this 'exasperating genius'. **Nigel Simeone**

THE GRAMOPHONE COLLECTION

Bernstein's Serenade

This five-movement concerto was inspired by Plato's writings on love in all its guises. Getting the tone right was never going to be easy, says **David Gutman** – who nonetheless finds several recordings to savour

Leonard Bernstein did not expect his own concert pieces to survive. It was this, rather than the well-chronicled vicissitudes of his emotional life, that most unsettled him. His significant anniversary gives us the chance to think again and maybe prove him wrong.

In the case of his personal favourite, the *Serenade* (after Plato's *Symposium*) for solo violin, percussion, harp and strings, acceptance might have come sooner were it not for its cumbersome title. Indeed, the whole notion of composing a serenade in the wake of the Second World War seems odd for all that Korngold and Harold Shapero had recently composed large-scale examples. Neither of those resembles a violin concerto, but Bernstein had no qualms about challenging classically ordained terminology, complicating things further with the programmatic framework he appended to the almost finished score. On one level this recontextualises Stravinsky's more austere Grecian preoccupations as if in jest. On another, Bernstein had been rereading Plato's *Symposium* on his honeymoon and its alcohol-fuelled speculations regarding the varieties of love may have provided an intellectual bolthole from the narrow mores of McCarthyism. At times, the *Serenade's* structure reflects neither the running order nor the character of the speakers in its ostensible source. It does, however, present a series of comparably interlocking statements in which each movement stretches the thematic elastic of its predecessor.

CHANGING FORTUNES

If we include two live relays, one with Gidon Kremer filmed at the LSO's

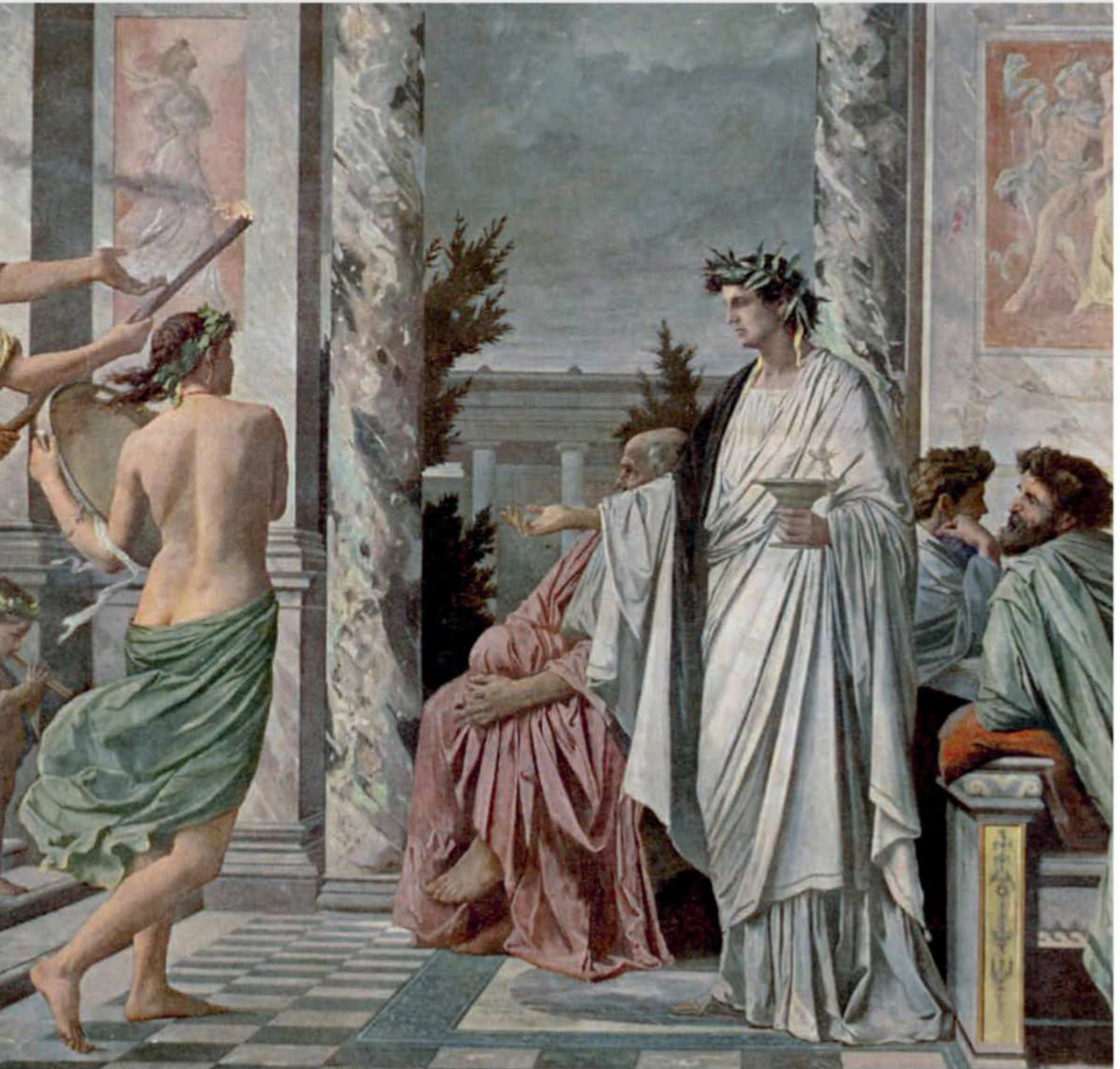
Bernstein Festival, the other a New York Philharmonic date with the band's then concertmaster, Glenn Dicterow, Bernstein recorded this pseudo-violin concerto five times. That certainly looks like special pleading, yet following its appropriation as a successful dance piece, the *Serenade* has lately achieved core repertoire status. Although not every younger luminary has made a commercial recording, it is played by Nicola Benedetti, James Ehnes, Augustin Hadelich, Simone Lamsma and Tasmin Little, with Janine Jansen taking it to the Schleswig-Holstein Musik Festival this month on what would have been the eve of Bernstein's 100th birthday. There remains just one surprising omission from a burgeoning discography. Midori famously gave the work under Bernstein's direction at Tanglewood in 1986 aged only 14. Undeterred then by the breaking of an E string (twice!), she has continued to champion it – but has not made a commercial recording.

Why the change in fortunes? Our pick-and-mix era relishes both the *Serenade's* sometimes sophisticated, sometimes demotic mode of communication (premonitions of *West Side Story's* 'Maria' and *Mass's* 'A Simple Song') and the exotic accompaniment of timpani, snare drum, tenor drum, bass drum, triangle, suspended cymbal, tambourine, Chinese blocks, xylophone, glockenspiel, chimes, harp and strings. Is the *Serenade* coming into its own now because it displays more 'biological' personality than the conformist norm, or because it demonstrates a motivic unity that develops in almost Brahmsian fashion, or simply because the composer is no longer around to intimidate potential



Plato's Symposium by Anselm Feuerbach (1829-80)

executants? In a screeching diagnostic U-turn, many commentators now proclaim the *Serenade* a masterpiece. One current champion, Baiba Skride, is refreshingly candid: 'I love the piece, but it's challenging – the violin writing isn't very idiomatic, the intonation can be difficult, there's nowhere to breathe – and it's hard to get the overall idea of the piece because it's all chopped up into different movements' (*Gramophone*, 2/18). Dicterow concurs: 'I don't believe Lenny really knew the technical ins and outs of the fiddle at the time he wrote the



PHOTOGRAPHY: SCIENCE HISTORY IMAGES/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

Serenade. He received some help from [Isaac] Stern, of course.' The score was completed on August 7, 1954, in tardy response to a commission from the Koussevitzky Music Foundation while also fulfilling Bernstein's promise to write something for his violinist friend. It was premiered at the Teatro La Fenice, Venice, on September 12, with Bernstein himself directing Stern and the Israel PO. The following afternoon, Bernstein cabled his wife: 'SERENADE SOCKO BUT NOT WITH CRITI[C]S.'

PRESENTATION AND INTERPRETATION

The piece opens with unaccompanied violin in the manner of Prokofiev's Violin Concerto No 2, joined gradually by the strings. Immediately there are questions of tone and scale. Is this a violin concerto in all but name? Stern, Itzhak Perlman and Anne-Sophie Mutter, among the starriest to have tackled the piece in the studio, are so spotlit that it is difficult to draw any other conclusion. Whisper it softly: might not the new breed of decluttered, chamber-sized performance with all the

players taking responsibility for the end result work equally well? Salvatore Accardo, David Grimal and Kolja Blacher dispense with a separate conductor altogether. There have been presentational and technological changes since CBS released Stern's version on a single mono 12-inch LP with a turnover between movements three and four. One trend reclassifies the *Serenade* as easy listening and places it at the heart of 'crossover' albums or sequences of Americana. Hilary Hahn, on the other hand, pairs Bernstein

Stern and Bernstein making the first recording of *Serenade* in 1956

with Beethoven, noting that the composers were the same age when they composed their concertos. In 21st-century surround sound, Blacher opts for Haydn's First Violin Concerto. The advent of streaming may or may not nullify such issues.

As usual Bernstein himself left mixed messages about the *Serenade*, advising Dicterow, 'It's neo-classic, don't make it what it isn't,' although his own renditions are scarcely self-effacing. The score's

motivic DNA is present in that *mezza voce* opening solo. So should it be played objectively or charged with barely contained emotion in the manner Bernstein often favoured on the podium? The constantly fluctuating, asymmetrical metre suggests an underlying unease yet the accompanying injunctions include *molto legato*, the English word 'simply' and

an explicit prohibition of portamentos. Some violinists go for a muted, supercool exposition which, as Accardo shows, need not preclude lyrical beauty. Stern and Hahn play it absolutely straight *come scritto*. Others make the serenity feel distinctly provisional. If Zino Francescatti sounds fretful it's because his fast vibrato has a distinctive, nagging quality. As commanding as ever, Mutter is differently intrusive, her

pulsations slower and wider – and even she is not above inserting the odd apocryphal smooch. The trick is perhaps to show how Phaedrus's argument grows out of nothing – sound out of silence. Once the fugal texture has lurched into a Pausanias-inspired faster section, Stravinsky looms large with shades of the Violin Concerto and *L'histoire du soldat* – so how dry should performers make it? The booklet note for Accardo's SACD even claims that Stravinsky was on the podium for the first performance!

Invoking the fairy-tale mythology of love, the second movement's Aristophanes music is at once restrained and compositionally taut, a quiet place perversely ungrateful for the soloist. Hahn's effortless pitching of the double-stopping from letter E is rare indeed. The third movement, a divertingly brilliant 'Eryximachus' scherzo, is for Vadim Gluzman 'one of the most technically demanding things [he has] ever played, with the violin and orchestra going round and round each other'. He dispatches it in less than a minute and a half, whereas Rachel Kolly d'Alba (under John Axelrod) is more than ten per cent slower, mindful of an asterisked note in the printed score: 'Play all notes if possible.'

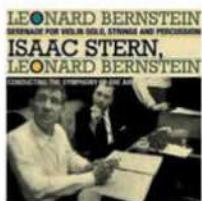
The fourth movement, linked to Agathon's panegyric to 'all of love's powers, charms and functions', is the emotional core of the work, where the composer channels Shostakovich, provides a cadenza for the soloist and demonstrates his own mastery of extended melody. Few have equalled Stern's straightforward eloquence in the main idea, whose accompanying string texture gets under way with the evocative injunction *murmurando*. Few play it as slowly.

The finale begins in a mood of high seriousness, Socrates holding forth on what has already been said musically. Bernstein plainly loved this passage, audibly urging his orchestras forward, which can make the rhetoric feel inflated. There follows a heated discussion between violin and cello before the dialogue achieves a vertiginous euphony. Alcibiades's arrival with uninvited guests in tow provokes more colloquial sounds in the ensuing rondo. With the

CLASSIC CHOICE

Stern *vn* Symphony of the Air / Bernstein
Minuet © 428417

Flawed as it is, the work's premiere recording remains a fascinating and evocative



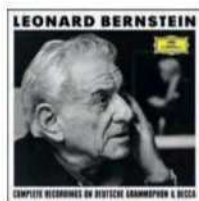
document with Stern at his best in the lyrical heart of the music. Technology has moved on but there's no mistaking the soloist's big-hearted playing.

AUDIO-VISUAL ALTERNATIVE

Kremer *vn* LSO / Bernstein

DG © (121 discs) + 36 DVD + 1 Blu-ray 479 8418

The composer-conductor is here documented in sound and vision with his favourite



London orchestra and a frequent latter-day collaborator as soloist. While Kremer's sonority is less than lustrous, his commitment can scarcely be doubted.

WHERE WE ARE NOW

Ferschtman *vn* Gelders Orchestra / Vásquez
Challenge Classics © CC72755

Amid the slew of breezier recordings affirming the *Serenade*'s enhanced repertoire



status, Ferschtman stands out as exceptionally rapt and thoughtful. Emotional states are demarcated and sonorities sifted with rare insight.

soloist called upon to ape inebriation and the strings making various attempts to imitate a swing band, many earlier performances sound ugly and muddled rather than sparky and joyous. Has the raw physicality of love after all carried the day? The composer's annotation is more guarded: 'If there is a hint of jazz in the celebration, I hope it will not be taken as anachronistic Greek party-music, but rather the natural expression of a contemporary American composer imbued with the spirit of that timeless dinner party.' Getting the tone right was never going to be easy.

THE RECORDINGS - IN MORE DETAIL

It was **Isaac Stern** who edited and fingered the violin part prior to publication as well as making the first recording in New York in April 1956. Bernstein directs members of Toscanini's disbanded radio orchestra and the reading is nothing if not heartfelt. Even in distinctly unrefined mono, Stern's burnished sculptural sound is simply glorious in the lyrical music (the vibrato surprisingly rapid though never invasive). The faster music, however sassy, sometimes lacks comparable assurance, the tuning iffy, members of the Symphony of the Air scrambling for a foothold and their youthful maestro inclined to over-egg the pudding. The ungainliness is exaggerated by wooden and compressed sound.

There are awkward corners in Bernstein's stereo remake with **Zino Francescatti**, a formidable virtuoso in his sixties by 1965. While the conception is sure, for me at least that dazzling vibrato fails to transcend its period. The big advance is the idiomatic contribution of Bernstein's New York Philharmonic, only this time there's too much hall resonance.

Gidon Kremer is represented twice. Whereas many swear by his 1979 audio-only version with the Israel PO, the blunter-sounding DVD from London's Barbican Hall (currently subsumed within DG's centennial 'Complete Recordings' box) has essential documentary value. With this always-exploratory soloist on top form and the composer-conductor wielding his reading glasses as an eccentric prop, disinclined to dawdle, the exchange of ideas never treeds water. The male-dominated LSO of 1986 digs in, leaning against bar lines as if to the manner born. For all his sensitivity and responsiveness, the drawback for some will be Kremer's less than glossy sonority.

Glenn Dicterow was Bernstein's soloist when the *Serenade* featured in a New York Philharmonic coast-to-coast concert tour that same year. Nevertheless, there is a case for preferring the second of



Bernstein and Kremer recorded *Serenade* twice

Dicterow's surviving concert recordings, sourced from the same orchestra's 1990 memorial concert given just four days after Bernstein's death and which reportedly left everyone in tears. Leonard Slatkin gives his soloist greater freedom to inflect lines his own way, and 'Agathon' has a depth of feeling missing from Slatkin's own highly accomplished studio rendering with **Robert McDuffie** (1989).

SHIFTING AWAY FROM US INPUT

Braver still was **Hu Kun**'s 1991 project. Discounting Serge Blanc's semi-private French vinyl release with Georges Tzipine and ORTF forces (1970), this looks to be the first commercial recording without direct American input. Kun plays sweetly – even if his accompanists are frantic

rather than gleeful as the tempo picks up, receding tactfully into the dim recesses of Leominster Priory.

For confident professional finish look no further than **Itzhak Perlman** (1994). The work was a late addition to his repertoire but as ever his playing can only be described as glorious and Seiji Ozawa's Bostonians are suitably plush (if recessed) in support. Heifetz and Karajan might have come up with something similar, downplaying the edgier interaction of graciousness and brilliance hardwired into the score.

In 1998, **Hilary Hahn** (aged 18) brought phenomenal tuning, clean articulation and quicksilver sophistication to music conceived on some level as philosophical discourse. After Perlman's sumptuousness, Hahn's sheer finesse casts its own spell as if a sense of intellectual detachment comes more naturally to her. Assisted by sound recording of real clarity with tighter imaging, her Baltimore team let light and air into Bernstein's compositional texture rather than imitating the dynamism and rubato of his conducting.

Salvatore Accardo tackled the work in 1998 with his own Italian CO in a recording that merited wider distribution. There's some lack of swing and the odd awkward corner, but Accardo's brand of *espressivo* is free of portamento excess, and the unforced, lithe sound of his solo instrument, animated by a vibrato narrower and faster than Hahn's, is appealing. Imagine a less extreme version of Francescatti's idiosyncratic timbre – it's possible that the same violin was used – and a much less

SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

RECORDING DATE / ARTISTS

RECORD COMPANY (REVIEW DATE)

1956	Stern Sym of the Air / Bernstein	Minuet (B) 428417; Sony Classical (S) 10 88697 27988-2 (3/09)
1965	Francescatti New York PO / Bernstein	Sony Classical (S) 7 88697 88086-2; (S) 10 88697 27988-2 (3/09)
1979	Kremer Israel PO / Bernstein	DG (M) 445 185-2GH (2/80*)
1986	Dicterow New York PO / Bernstein	New York Philharmonic (S) 2 D NYP20140201/2
1986	Kremer LSO / Bernstein	DG (S) (121 discs) + 36 DVD + 1 Blu-ray 479 8418
1989	McDuffie St Louis SO / Slatkin	EMI/Warner Classics (M) D 206611-2 (12/89*)
1990	Dicterow New York PO / Slatkin	New York Philharmonic (S) 10 NYP9904
1991	Kun English String Orch / Boughton	Nimbus (F) NI5329 (6/92)
1994	Perlman Boston SO / Ozawa	Warner Classics (M) 2564 61296-8 (6/95*)
1998	Accardo Italian CO	Fonè (F) 99 096SACD; (F) 041-1LP; CD Gold (F) 035
1998	Hahn Baltimore SO / Zinman	Sony (M) SK60584; Sony Classical (S) 5 88875 12618-2 (3/99)
2000	Bell Philh Orch / Zinman	Sony Classical (M) D SK89358 (10/01); (S) 14 88985 39520-2
2003	Mutter LSO / Previn	DG (M) D 474 500-2GH (12/03)
2005	Quint Bournemouth SO / Alsop	Naxos (M) 8 559245 (12/05); (S) 8 + DVD 8 508018
2007	Gluzman São Paulo SO / Neschling	BIS (F) 99 BIS-SACD1662 (3/10)
2010	R Capuçon Bruckner Orch, Linz / DR Davies	Orange Mountain (F) OMM0114 (5/17)
2010	Grimal Les Dissonances	Dissonances (M) 3 LDO08
2011	Kolly d'Alba Pays de la Loire Nat Orch / Axelrod	Warner Classics (F) 2564 65765-7 (12/12)
2013	Murray Poitou-Charentes Orch / Heisser	Mirare (F) MIR244
2015	Meyers LSO / Lockhart	eOne (F) EOM-CD7792
2016	Blacher Württemberg CO, Heilbronn	Coviello (F) 99 COV91711
2017	Ferschtman Gelders Orch / Vásquez	Challenge Classics (F) 99 CC72755 (5/18)

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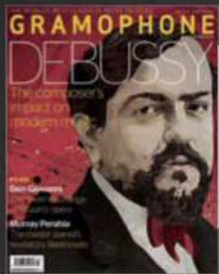
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An 18-year-old Hilary Hahn, partnered by David Zinman, gives the most 'complete' performance

bullish accompaniment. Whatever the format, the original sound source is audiophile analogue, faithfully relaying the acoustics of a 19th-century Italian theatre.

UN-AMERICAN OUTINGS

Other relatively discreet, fastidious and un-American options were to follow, and it's a matter of taste whether you hear them as workmanlike or revelatory. Hall resonance amplifies distinguished chamber-sized accounts from **David Grimal** (2010) and **Kolja Blacher** (2016), but where Blacher and the Württemberg CO avoid extremes of mood and dynamic, Les Dissonances, Grimal's dedicated artists' collective, go for broke live in concert. Both 'Agathon' movements feel a little rushed, though: Blacher's is all over in 5'50".

No harsh sounds come from the violin of **Joshua Bell** (2000). Still, it's difficult to understand why the Bernstein estate countenanced the soupy arrangements making up the bulk of his original CD release. The inevitable *West Side Story* selection takes top billing and the sound is on the bright side without impairing the honeyed precision of the playing.

Rachel Kolly d'Alba (2011) includes a slightly less dodgy suite from Geršwin's *Porgy and Bess* on her 'American Serenade' album, her Bernstein personally inflected, intimate rather than grandstanding, with some distracting sniffing audible through headphones. So too with low-key

Tai Murray (2013), a more peripheral participant on an 'American Journey' album showcasing the talents of pianist-conductor Jean-François Heisser in Barber, Herrmann, Geršwin and Ives.

Anne Akiko Meyers (2015) takes centre stage on her London-made 'Serenade: The Love Album', which kicks off somewhat incongruously with a taut, confident Bernstein performance lacking the *n*th degree of refinement. Airless recording exaggerates a tendency to chop up lines that are conventionally rendered with greater lyrical continuity. Sentimentality is held in reserve for the accompanying raft of 'lurve'-related MOR retreads, haunting, even witty in their way.

Dating from 2003, **Anne-Sophie Mutter's** celebration of love, also with the LSO, is more 'classical': she couples the Bernstein with the concerto written for her by her then husband, André Previn. Sceptics will point to instances of implausibly wide vibrato, scooping and swooning – yet there's nothing that isn't intended. And with conductor Previn as guide, the jazzier sections are more idiomatic than you might expect, the quiet bits truly quiet. Throughout, timings are remarkably similar to Stern's, 'Agathon' even more deliberate. Mutter's visceral commitment is spectacular in its way, outshining the more mainstream response of **Philippe Quint** (2005) – although Marin Alsop conducts the Bournemouth SO with predictable

expertise. **Renaud Capuçon** (2010) is almost certainly playing Stern's treasured Guarneri instrument for all that his own vibrato is considerably wider and his interpretative manner cooler. On this occasion he never gets under the skin of the music and the acoustic of Linz's Brucknerhaus comes across as inappropriately spacious. There's a heart-on-sleeve insistence about the playing of **Vadim Gluzman** (2007), a Stern discovery whose devotion to the score can scarcely be doubted but whose extrovert style I find uncongenial, the dexterity more confident than the tuning in *altissimi*. Vivid SACD recording brings him close.

Two 2017 recordings raise the stakes. **Liza Ferschtman** has been playing the *Serenade* since 2013 and her chamberish approach and laserlike purity do not preclude poise and bite where required, the finale uncommonly deft. This is, remarkably, a concert relay with applause retained. Baiba Skride fills a bigger emotional canvas in her Orfeo recording (with the Gothenburg Symphony under Santtu-Matias Rouvali) due out in August. Having been fortunate enough to hear an early pressing, I found the work to be played unapologetically as a masterpiece of Western art music with impressive variety of tone and dynamic, minimal gloom and a refusal to push the pace where not strictly necessary. The third movement is swift yet ungarbled with an exquisite *pianissimo* payoff; 'Agathon' (7'31") isn't quite flawless up top but might just be the most moving of all.

How to sum up? Yes, Hahn is technically the bee's knees – you don't have to be a score-reader irked by less-than-perfect intonation to find her literal fidelity something to marvel at. Ferschtman is more openly emotive, providing a sense of resolution rather than the usual manic entertainment. Still, it is arguably Hahn and Zinman who best create the conditions for further exploration. Moving on from maestro Bernstein's brand of signposted commitment, Bernstein the composer would seem to be in safe hands. **G**

TOP CHOICE

Hahn *vs* Baltimore SO / Zinman

Sony Classical **SK60584**

Hilary Hahn and David Zinman posit a cooler, less interventionist, strictly accurate take on



the score, presaging the stripped-down intimacy often favoured today. The 'neutral' accompaniment won't spoil you for more personalised interpretations.

PERFORMANCES & EVENTS

Presenting live concert and opera performances from around the world, and reviews of archived music-making available online to stream where you want, when you want

Oberlin Conservatory of Music, Oberlin, Severance Hall, Cleveland & online

The Thomas and Evon Cooper International Competition, July 18 & 20

A joint venture between Ohio's Oberlin Conservatory of Music and the Cleveland Orchestra, this annual competition is for accomplished young musicians aged between 13 and 18. Each year it rotates between piano and violin, and for 2018 it's the piano's turn. Don't dismiss it because of the youthful age band either; remember that BBC Young Musician was this year categorically won by 16-year-old pianist Lauren Zhang. Both category finals (July 18) are being streamed live via the competition's website, and the Concerto Finals (July 20) are also being broadcast on Cleveland's classical music station, WCLV.

oberlin.edu/cooper/

Kentucky Center, Louisville & online at NPR Louisville Orchestra in Festival of American Music, July 19

We know that these days we very rarely draw your attention to events which only have an audio element remotely. However, we feel this one's worth mentioning, and perhaps especially for UK readers from a repertoire

perspective at least. Louisville's local NPR station will weekly this summer broadcast concerts from the 2017-18 Louisville Orchestra season. The main highlight is July 19, when the performance being broadcast is of the charismatic Teddy Abrams conducting the orchestra during the Festival of American Music, in a programme that includes Julia Wolfe's *riSE and fLY* and Michael Gordon's *Natural History*. In other words, two prominent US composers whose music doesn't make regular appearances on UK concert platforms.

wuol.org/louisvilleorchestra/

Royal Albert Hall, London & BBC Four

Bertrand Chamayou makes his BBC Proms debut, July 20

Another 'we know we don't usually do this on these pages', but the French pianist Bertrand Chamayou is making his BBC Proms debut on this particular evening; shortlisted in the 2016 *Gramophone* Awards for his superb Ravel album (now one of our Top Ravel Recordings picks online), Chamayou doesn't have nearly the profile in the UK that he deserves, so it's great to see him finally at the Proms. He's joining the BBC National Orchestra of Wales and Thomas Søndergård for Mendelssohn's Piano Concerto No 1

(we cannot wait to hear his reading of the chamber-textured slow movement), and the rest of the evening's music is also interesting: Lili Boulanger's *D'un matin de printemps* and *D'un soir triste*; Nocturne by the even-less-known female composer contemporary of Boulanger, Morfydd Owen; then, to close, Schumann's Symphony No 4. The Prom is being recorded for broadcast on BBC Four on Sunday, July 22.

bbc.co.uk/proms

Harbin Conservatory of Music, China & online Alice & Eleonore Schoenfeld International String Competition, July 23-27

Held in Harbin, China, this international competition may only be in its fourth edition, but it's quickly gaining an international profile as one of Asia's major music competitions. It runs three categories: violinists, cellists, and chamber groups which are divided into piano trio, piano quartet and string quartet. Violinists and cellists compete for a top prize of USD\$30,000, while chamber groups stand to win USD\$20,000. The semi-finals and finals will be recorded and then uploaded onto the competition website in the evenings after each performance.

schoenfeldcompetition.com

ONLINE OPERA REVIEW

Mariella Devia bids farewell to the role of Bellini's Norma in a production from Venice's Teatro La Fenice



Bellini

Kara Walker's production of *Norma*, re-set in the Congo under Belgian rule, wouldn't be enough to draw me to this OperaVision stream from La Fenice, Venice's jewel of an opera house. The action plays out in front of giant cut-out jungle silhouettes, with 'druids' in orange

robes and shaggy wigs, the high priest Oroveso cast as a witch doctor. Pollione's pal Flavio rocks up in a pith helmet, representing the invading Romans forces. It was dubbed *Norma africana* on social media and, although an appropriate concept, Walker does absolutely nothing with it in terms of her *Personenregie*.

Nor would I turn to this production for most of the musical performances. After a bracing account of the overture, Riccardo Frizza is attentive to his singers, with a fine sense of *bel canto* line. Stefan Pop is a bullish Pollione, Luca Tittoto a reliable Oroveso and soprano Carmela Remigio sings a decent Adalgisa. Remigio has

previously taken the title role in this Venetian production, but that honour falls here to Mariella Devia and it is she who is the principal reason for listening.

Devia, who turned 70 earlier this year, has achieved professional longevity by largely sticking to the *bel canto* roles to which her soprano is suited and never forcing herself into bigger repertoire. Incredibly, she didn't take on Norma until she was 65! Her soprano is now a little frayed at the edges, but still quite remarkable. She crafts phrases tenderly in 'Casta diva', high notes perfectly placed and incredible control over *pianissimos*. If the cabaletta is taken a tad carefully, her performance remains an object lesson to singers half her age. This was her farewell to the role and to the stage. What a tremendous servant she has been to *bel canto*. **Mark Pullinger**

Available to view, free of charge, until December 7 at operavision.com

Salle des Combins, Verbier & online

Verbier celebrates 25 years, July 25

The Verbier Festival marks its quarter century this summer, and unsurprisingly it's going big on its celebrations. Look at the festival this year, and there's an extent to which every concert has an air of occasion about it, but the one day that really is going very large is, unsurprisingly, the 25th. So, while medici.tv will as usual be streaming much of the festival, if you only catch one day then this is the one to catch. Firstly though, because throughout the day you'll be able to watch interviews and behind the scenes footage. Second, and most important, because the gala concert that night promises to be spectacular. It features a long list of some of the festival's most regular big-name artists – over 40 of them, in fact – including Martha Argerich, Daniil Trifonov, Vilde Frang, Janine Jansen, Gautier and Renaud Capuçon, Pinchas Zukerman, Mischa Maisky, Thomas Quasthoff, Sir Andrés Schiff and Yuja Wang. What the programme will actually be is still under wraps, but clearly this is the absolutely unmissable event on this month's pages.

medici.tv

Festspielhaus, Bregenz & Takt1

David Afkham conducts the Vienna Symphony Orchestra, July 29

It's strange these days to think that when the Bregenz Festival was first mounted in 1946 it was as a weekend-long event over which an opera, accompanied by the Vienna SO, was staged on two makeshift barges moored on the side of Lake Constance, Bregenz having no theatre. These days the month-long multi-opera and concert festival boasts a large and purpose-built offshore stage, and another large, purpose-built indoor Festspielhaus. What hasn't changed, though, is that the Vienna Symphony (one of our shortlisted ensembles for our new Orchestra of the Year Award) is always the orchestra in residence, and this morning's symphonic concert under the baton of David Afkham looks worth watching. On the bill are Richard Strauss and Ravel, the two Strauss numbers being *Till Eulenspiegels lustige Streiche* and the suite from *Der Rosenkavalier*, while the two Ravel works are *La valse*, and the Piano Concerto for the Left Hand with Pierre-Laurent Aimard.

bregenzfestspiele.com, takt1.com

Somerset House, London & from September 28 cinemas worldwide

Advance screening of *The Wife*, August 9 at Somerset House

Why are we bringing your attention to a film on this page? Because the soundtrack has been written by Jocelyn Pook – also of course a writer of music for the concert stage – who this year won a BAFTA for Best

ONLINE CONCERT REVIEW

Sir Simon Rattle galvanises the amateur BE Phil Orchestra in Brahms



a helicopter engineer from Turkey, a member of the University of South Carolina's law faculty, a lawyer from Canada, a police officer and a dentist, both from the Netherlands, an engineer from Brazil – to make music. As the orchestra's Assistant

Brahms

'Could we be noble rather than aggressive?' says Sir Simon Rattle midway through a rehearsal of the finale of Brahms's First Symphony, and then adds, a touch sardonically, 'It'd be quite a good thing for all over the world, wouldn't it?' The moment is just one of many gems captured in a tiny, beautifully judged documentary that introduces a performance by the 100 per cent amateur, and impressively international, BE Phil Orchestra. It's an ensemble assembled under the aegis of the Berlin Philharmonic which gathers in the Philharmonie to rehearse and give a public performance. Watch the documentary and then the Brahms No 1 and I can guarantee you'll spend 70 of the most inspirational minutes away from a world that seems intent of tearing itself apart. Here, as Rattle says, 'it's full of joy'.

The age range of the BE Phil Orchestra must be something like 15-70, and its members come from all over the world –

Conductor Stanley Dodds, who whips them into shape and makes the ensemble gel before Rattle comes in to lift things up a level, says, 'Here are 100 people playing music only because they love it'. And it's touching to see how it brings people together not just from all over the world but from so many age groups.

The performance of the Brahms is very fine, with lots of personality – they sound like a well-established orchestra with a lovely depth of string sound and some very impressive woodwind and brass playing. And the magic that Rattle undoubtedly spun is palpable throughout: the look of sheer pleasure on his face as he draws playing of this class from them is evident. And the added bonus for viewers here is that it's free to watch in the Digital Concert Hall. So, if you've never sampled the stylish production values and astoundingly crisp photography of the DCH – and want to be truly transported for an hour or so – start here! **James Jolly**
Available free to view at digitalconcerthall.com

Original Score for her soundtrack for *King Charles III*. Directed by Björn Runge and written by Jane Anderson, *The Wife* is based on the novel of the same name by Meg Wolitzer. It stars Glenn Close, Jonathan Price and Christian Slater, and tells the story of a wife who questions her life choices as she travels to Stockholm with her husband, who is set to receive the Nobel Prize for Literature. So, an interesting-sounding film with some interesting-sounding music to boot.

somersetthouse.org.uk

Grosses Festspielhaus, Salzburg & Takt1

Mariss Jansons conducts *The Queen of Spades*, August 17

Hans Neuenfels's new production for the Salzburg Festival of Tchaikovsky's *The Queen of Spades* is now sold out, so thank goodness for the ability to watch remotely via live streams. Mariss Jansons conducts a cast full of Russian speakers which includes Brandon Jovanovich as Hermann, Vladislav Sulimsky as Count Tomsky and Plutus, Igor Golovatenko as Prince Yeletsky, Evgenia Muraveva as Liza and Oksana Volkova as Polina and Daphnis, and Hanna Schwarz as the Countess. The ensembles meanwhile are of course the Vienna Philharmonic, the Salzburg Festival and Theatre Children's Choir, and the Concert Association of the Vienna State Opera Chorus.
saltzburgerfestspiele.at, takt1.com

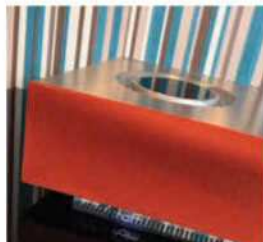
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A novel take on bringing streaming to your system, Roon launches its new Nucleus for multiroom audio, and is the online music world changing?

Andrew Everard, Audio Editor

AUGUST TEST DISCS



This superb recording from 2L, in resolutions up to DSD256, is a strikingly dynamic set of percussion works by Xenakis and Feldman.



A wonderfully detailed and atmospheric recording of Biber's *Mystery Sonatas*, made all the more so in 96kHz/24-bit Linn Studio Master.

Building on budget success

Affordable speakers take on technology from flagship designs, and new products with a vinyl flavour

UK-based Q Acoustics has developed a strong reputation for value-for-money speakers with a high standard of performance. Its latest arrival is a revision of its successful 3000 series, incorporating technology trickled down from the company's hugely impressive Concept 500 flagship speaker. The new 3000i range **1** starts at just £199 for the 3010i standmount model: along with the step-up 3020i, at £249, this model has been made a little taller and some 25 per cent deeper to give better bass from compact enclosures. Adopted from the £4000 Concept 500 is point-to-point bracing to stiffen the cabinets in crucial areas, while internal Helmholtz Pressure Equaliser tubes eliminate resonances in the 3050i floorstanders, which sell for £649. There's also a matching 3090Ci centre speaker at £169 and an active subwoofer with 20cm driver and 150W Class D amplifier, the £329 3060Si. Two 5.1-channel packages, based around the 3010i and 3050i, are available at £895 and £1345 respectively. The speakers come in a choice of finishes: Graphite Grey, English Walnut, Carbon Black or Arctic White.

Though it may be slight overkill for use with those budget speakers (!), Audio Research's new Reference 160M monobloc **2** gives new meaning to the idea of transparent amplification, with a see-through power meter in its front panel providing a view of the glowing valves within. Hidden LEDs illuminate the meter and the brightness can be dimmed to balance the two sources of interest,



while the amplifier uses two 6H30 valves in its gain stage and two matched pairs of KT150 power tubes to deliver an output of 140W. The amplifier sells for £28,998 a pair.

A new addition to the PureAA line from Italian company Audio Analogue, the AAphono **3** is an entirely configurable phono stage designed to make the most of any cartridge for the best sound from vinyl. Gain and loading can be adjusted for moving coil cartridges, as can moving magnet input capacitance and resistance; and, unlike some designs that require the user to adjust dip-switches on the rear panel or even inside, the AAphono is configured using the front-panel controls and the settings memorised even with the power off. Within, there are three toroidal transformers – one for each channel and a separate one for the control circuitry – and selected components throughout the signal paths. The AAphono is housed in Audio Analogue's resonance-damped casework, finished in black or silver. It sells for £1599.

Still on the vinyl beat, there's a new tonearm from Timestep **4**, perhaps best-known for its tuning of turntables such as the Technics direct-drive series. The Dartmouth-based company has drawn on the technology of the Japanese Fidelity Research FR64S tonearm of some 40 years back and updated it with the latest materials and processes to create an arm especially suited to low-compliance moving coil cartridges. Using a titanium armtube and ceramic bearings in a stainless steel housing, the new arm comes with arm-lengths of nine, 10 and 12 inches respectively. Each sells for £1450.

Finally this month, news not of an arrival but of a departure. After 14 years in business Oppo Digital has decided to cease development of new products, which in the past have included class-leading Blu-ray players **5**, its planar magnetic headphone range and the Sonica DAC and multiroom speakers. The company hasn't given the reasons for its decision, saying only 'As Oppo's latest 4K UHD players reach the pinnacle of their performance, it is time to say goodbye', but it's thought Oppo Digital's Chinese parent company has decided the time is right to concentrate its efforts on its mobile phone range, which is highly successful in Asian markets. Existing Oppo Digital products will continue to be supported, and the company says 'Firmware will continue to be maintained and updates released from time to time.' **6**

● REVIEW PRODUCT OF THE MONTH

Rotel T14

Rotel has always had its own spin on network music playback and its latest tuner maintains that trend while also offering both DAB and FM reception



ROTEL T14

Type Streaming tuner

Price £699

Radio FM RDS, DAB/DAB+, with 30 presets for each

Network services DTS Play-Fi: playback from network storage, internet radio, streaming from services including Amazon Music, Qobuz, Spotify and Tidal

Outputs Line analogue, coaxial digital

Networking Wi-Fi (IEEE 802.11 b/g/a/n)

Other connections USB for service, RS232 for control, Rotel Link remote control, 12V trigger

Accessories supplied Remote handset, 'starter' antennae for FM/DAB, Wi-Fi antennae, connection cables

Finishes Silver, black

Dimensions (WxHxD) 43x9,3x33,4cm

rotel.com

Wi-Fi. There's also Play-Fi, developed by DTS, best known to date for its surround-sound technologies for movies and home cinema. DTS Play-Fi multiroom technology is now found in products from companies including Acer, Anthem, Arcam, Definitive Technology, Hewlett-Packard, MartinLogan, McIntosh, Onkyo/Pioneer (again!) and Rotel.

It's the Rotel implementation that's centre stage here, in the company's entry-level streaming solution, the £699 T14. It's not the first stab at this kind of thing from the Bowers & Wilkins-owned company but, to put it kindly, its previous efforts haven't made that much of an impression. Here Rotel offers another spin on the whole network thing, in that the T14 isn't just a network device but rather an FM RDS/DAB/DAB+ radio tuner, based on the £329 T11 but with added network audio capability.

That should make it of interest to the classical music listener, especially in the UK where Radio 3 continues to broadcast music in excellent quality both on FM – which has had a stay of execution – and DAB. In fact, such a tuner offers an ideal combination for the radio listener, combining the quality of 'over the air' broadcasting with the huge diversity of content available from around the world via internet streaming.

Separate antenna connections are provided on the rear of the T14 for FM and DAB, so if you're in an area where a folded dipole on the roof is enough for DAB but something more directional and with better gain is required for FM, these can be accommodated. Thirty

Anyone who has dipped their toe in the waters of 'computer audio' will know that, while the ideal of Universal Plug'n'Play and the efforts of the Digital Living Network Alliance are both very laudable, most hi-fi manufacturers somehow manage to put their own spin on this 'everything just works' compatibility. Indeed, if you try a number of different brands of network hardware, you'll find yourself with a variety of apps to control them and it becomes something of a game to discover which bits of Manufacturer A's control software will work with which aspects of Manufacturer B's hardware. As the old hi-fi industry saying goes, 'We love standards – that's why we have so many of them'.

The Rotel T14 isn't just a network device but rather an FM/DAB radio tuner with added network audio capability

As well as the variations on the theme used by the major hi-fi manufacturers, we have the likes of BluOS, the Denon-developed HEOS system, Sonos and even Roon (see page 120). Then we have FlareConnect on Onkyo/Pioneer products based on California-based Blackfire Research's FireConnect technology, which is also found in some Harman/Kardon products, and is able to distribute both multiple channels of audio and 4K video over standard – there's that word again –

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Developed alongside the Rotel range, these Bowers & Wilkins 684 S2 speakers offer both a room-filling sound and great value.



presets apiece are provided for analogue and digital radio. The Rotel also has two Wi-Fi antennae supplied, in the form of the usual stubby plastic devices. These should be more than sufficient even in tricky signal situations but it's worth nothing that there's no wired Ethernet connection provided, which is somewhat unusual in devices of this kind. There's also a USB connection here but it's provided purely for service purposes – the intention is that anything other than over-the-air radio is delivered using Play-Fi. Mind you, that's hardly a limitation: using the app it's possible to access streaming services including Amazon Music, Deezer, Pandora, Qobuz, Rhapsody, Spotify and Tidal – subject to availability, and subscriptions where required.

PERFORMANCE

Connection of the T14 is entirely conventional, the tuner having both analogue and coaxial digital outputs and being supplied with a remote handset. Wireless set-up is also simple, thanks to the Play-Fi system: from start-up the Rotel is just added as an AirPlay speaker using an iOS device and then joins your network and is available to the Play-Fi app.

Beyond that, using the tuner is simple: the supplied remote controls conventional radio tuning, while the app 'drives' the Play-Fi section, enabling music to be played from streaming services or network storage. It found all my music servers – a couple of my NAS units run a variety of media server packages for testing purposes, including their built-in software, Asset and MinimServer – and was quickly playing music with minimal fuss. The system will support content at up to 192kHz/24-bit: it runs at 48kHz/16-bit as default but for higher resolution one can tap the yellow and black 'Hi-Res audio' logo on the app before connecting it to the Rotel to engage what Play-Fi calls 'Critical Listening Mode'.

However, for hi-res streaming one will need a pretty stable Wi-Fi network, which may require a better router than that supplied by your ISP. Models such as the Apple Airport Extreme and the Asus RT-N66U will deliver stronger signal and better coverage in the average-size

home. Testing both of these with the Rotel showed it was perfectly possible to stream in hi-res when required.

The tuner section is very good, too, as was proved by some evenings listening to Radio 3 live concerts on both FM and DAB. With good rooftop aerials for both, I found the analogue feed a little smoother – though of course we know the links used for such broadcasts, and from studio to transmitter, are digital – but either radio section is good enough to justify the Rotel as 'your last conventional radio tuner'.

A look inside the T14 shows its layout to be very simple, with a lot of 'fresh-air engineering' around the boards for tuner, streaming and analogue audio. That pays off in a very direct, open sound, which is as much in evidence with network music or streaming services as it is with radio. It isn't the weightiest-sounding device but what lack of warmth and substance there is in the bass isn't sufficient to make it thin or brash, while the treble is sweet and clean if lacking the last nuances of air and detail.

In other words, the sound is slightly 'topped and tailed', which is no bad thing given the relatively modest amplification and speakers with which the T14 is likely to be used; the limitations are relatively benign, rather than colouring the balance to any obvious extent. To say that it covers its tracks very well may seem like damning with faint praise but what the Rotel does is very enjoyable, whether with the thrilling and crisply captured performance of Rachel Podger and Brecon Baroque on their recent *Four Seasons* (Channel Classics, 5/18) or the percussive attack of Colin Currie's recording of Steve Reich's *Drumming* (also 5/18). The slightly dry sound makes the most of the detail on offer and there's never any shortage of detail to ensure the attention is held, even with the large orchestral forces of the Düsseldorf Symphony's Mahler First Symphony under Adám Fischer (AVI, 4/18), where the sound stage has both focus and scale.

There's no shortage of hardware out there designed to bridge users over from CD to file-based music. The Rotel takes a different approach, aimed at the radio listener, and in so doing makes a very persuasive case for itself. **G**

Or you could try ...

Though rumours of the CD player's demise may have been exaggerated, a look around the major hi-fi retailers in search of a radio tuner might well find you in tumbleweed territory: celebrated budget buys such as the Denon TU-260L are long gone and there's a dearth of high-end designs these days.

Rotel T11

At the affordable end of the market, an obvious alternative is the simpler Rotel T11, which still offers FM RDS and DAB but lacks the Play-Fi streaming and sells for less than half the price of the T14. If you really want to stick to over-the-air broadcasts, it could be a great buy.



NAD C 427

Even simpler is the C 427 tuner from NAD, which has long majored in making simple, no-nonsense hi-fi components. This tuner is all analogue, and FM RDS/AM only, which has a certain old-school charm even if the sword of a switch-off of analogue radio services at some point hangs over it. But it's simple and, in the usual NAD way, good-sounding, too. Find out more at **nadelectronics.com**.



Yamaha CT-NT670D

As mentioned in the main review, there's no shortage of 'bridge' components providing an easy path into file-based and streaming music. Few, however, are as comprehensive as the Yamaha CT-NT670D. Combining network streaming, FM/DAB radio and CD in one box, it's a convenient way to bring all your music needs together – and at a sensible price, too. See **uk.yamaha.com**.



Beyond that, if you want a purist radio tuner, your best course is to scour the classified and auction sites for a used model, where you'll definitely find a bargain. Even the superb-sounding Audiolab 8000T seems to be selling for around £250.

● REVIEW

Roon Nucleus+

Known as the supplier of excellent digital music management software, the US-based company is now adding hardware. But what exactly is the Nucleus?

Regular readers will know that I am a fairly vocal advocate of Roon as a means of managing a digital music library, even though many I have spoken to have some difficulty grasping exactly what the software and its related service actually does. More on that in a moment; but the latest release from the company, which was acquired by Meridian as part of its Sooloos project and then spun off again to become Roon Labs, is not a software upgrade but a piece of hardware, the Nucleus. Selling for prices starting at £1500, Nucleus is just as likely to have many scratching their heads.

Like other software players, the Roon system lets you access and play your music collection, in this case on multiple Roon-ready devices such as network players and DACs. You can control it from a computer or via a tablet/phone interface, group devices together – even if they’re of different brands – to play the same music in multiple zones all the way up to ultra-high-resolution, provided the digital-to-analogue conversion in the ‘endpoint’ can handle it. If it can’t, Roon’s digital signal processing (DSP) will downsample it to suit. It can upsample lower-resolution content to make the most of your chosen playback hardware, as well as allowing equalisation and room correction to optimise the sound.

But that’s only part of the story. At the heart of Roon is an excellent music database, allowing extended data to be displayed including reviews and extra images relating to the music being played. If your files come with a PDF booklet, that can be viewed on the screen of the controlling device, too, and the system allows music streaming services such as Tidal to be integrated with your own library of files, appearing as one seamless collection. It will analyse what you’re playing and, if you want, carry on with similar music when your selection has finished. Additionally, it integrates internet radio feeds if required. For all this information-crunching you pay a subscription, which currently stands at \$119 (about £86) a year, or you can pay \$499 (£360) for lifetime support. That may sound a lot but the additional data and file-handling Roon offers enhances the listening experience and proves highly addictive.

Roon requires a single device on your network to act as a ‘core’, hosting the server software, which could be a computer or even a NAS (network-attached storage) unit. This is where Nucleus comes in. The two models provide a computer to host Roon, optimised for the task and designed as the ‘brains’ of a Roon system. The basic version uses an Intel i3 processor with 4GB of RAM and can support libraries of up to 12,000 albums (or 120,000 tracks), permitting streaming to up to six zones at once, while the premium Nucleus+, at £2500, uses a faster i7 processor with 8GB of RAM and can handle more zones and larger libraries as well as offering the full range of Roon’s DSP functions.

Both models offer the option of having a solid state drive fitted internally and two USB ports for external drives. Additionally, they can work with offboard NAS units, while audio output is available on both USB for an external DAC and HDMI, which can be used to feed an AV receiver or processor with multichannel audio. Housed in high-quality metal casework

There are lots of very good reasons why one should consider being a committed ‘Roonophile’

with extensive heatsinking to provide fanless cooling for silent operation, the Nucleus units have been developed in association with Intel and are based around that company’s NUC (Next Unit of Computing) small form-factor technology.

Dig deep enough in the Roon website and you’ll find ‘recipes’ for building your own NUC-based computer and even a kit of parts available from that famous online retailer named after a major river. You’ll need to know what you’re doing, though, and be confident about installing and configuring hardware, operating systems and the Roon software.

That, in essence, is what Nucleus is all about. The two models offer all the convenience of a stand-alone Roon core in what the computer people call a ‘turnkey’ solution. You plug them in, sign up for your Roon subscription and they just work, without the need for any computer knowhow.

**ROON NUCLEUS+**

Type Roon Core server

Price from £1500

Configuration Intel i3 processor/4GB RAM (Nucleus); i7/8GB (Nucleus+)

Connections Ethernet, two USB Type A, HDMI; Thunderbolt port – ‘may become active in a future firmware update’; power supply

Accessories supplied Power supply

Dimensions (WxHxD) 21.2x7.4x15.6cm

roonlabs.com

henleyaudio.co.uk (UK distributor)

PERFORMANCE

Just for once, I’m not going to talk about sound quality, as the Nucleus really doesn’t have a sonic signature, even when used ‘direct’ into a DAC or AV receiver. What differences there are will be down to the digital hardware you connect to the Roon unit, which simply provides a high-quality feed via USB and HDMI.

Instead, the gains here are in the simplicity of installation and set-up, the almost instantaneous boot-up and the rock-solid functioning of the Roon software running on the Nucleus. My existing set-up, with Roon installed on one of my NAS units, can very occasionally stall when the server is working hard – for example when uploading a lot of files – but there are no such problems with the Nucleus acting as a ‘hub’ for the system, even when using several Roon endpoints at once to play music in multiple rooms.

For the committed ‘Roonophile’ – and there are lots of very good reasons why one should consider being such – that alone would recommend the Nucleus as a vital, if rather expensive, addition to a digital music system. But there might still be a nagging doubt that one could achieve much the same thing more cost-effectively with an Intel NUC mini-PC kit and a bit of fiddling – which I think is something I’m going to explore soon. **G**

● ESSAY

Things aren't always what they seem and sometimes it's hard to work out who owns what

Keeping track of the machinations in the audio industry could be a full-time job – when people say ‘sales are up’ it seems they’re referring to companies, not products

The busy times in the audio business continue. At least one trend survey shows that hi-fi buying may be making something of a comeback, but most of the action is behind the scenes, with some companies changing hands and others rethinking what they do and the products they offer. The machinations have now reached a level where what would once have been headline news – at least in the audio press – now often merits only a passing reference. Two recent moves, though, have concerned a couple of the best-known hi-fi magazines themselves.

The UK's best-seller, *What Hi-Fi?*, has moved from the company where it was founded more than 40 years ago to a new home as part of Future Publishing. Meanwhile the influential US magazine *Stereophile* has come under the same British ownership as *Hi-Fi News* magazine. The American title has an even longer history – though nothing like *Gramophone*'s 95 years – but of late has been bouncing around between owners. The same kind of consolidation we have seen among hardware manufacturers is now affecting the magazines, and for much the same reasons. While these moves aren't quite on the Asda/Sainsbury's scale, even at this level the benefits in terms of cost savings are fairly obvious.

The moves and acquisitions in the audio industry could keep many a journalist in business more or less full time. Most weeks I receive email notices of such moves but often it takes a bit of digging to work out what the implications are, or indeed what has actually happened. For example, a recent announcement that Chinese company TCL had bought the Onkyo brand threw up all sorts of questions. For a start there was whether this meant all Onkyo products would now be made in China by a third party – best known as one of the world's largest mass consumer electronics manufacturers, not to mention the third-largest TV maker. Then questions arose as to how this would affect the situation of Onkyo within the beleaguered Gibson Brands group, part of the famous guitar company, and indeed Pioneer, which is owned by Onkyo.



The demise of Technics Tracks is symptomatic of the changes and rationalisations currently taking place in the audio market

The answers have been reassuring, with ‘those in the know’ telling me that TCL has only bought the rights to use the Onkyo brand on mass-market products, not on core AV/hi-fi products, and that the main Gibson involvement was with the brand's North American operations. So Onkyo and Pioneer go on but now with the freedom not to have to develop those ‘diffusion’ products – headphones and the like – while still reaping the rewards of their brand names.

The moves and acquisitions in the audio industry could keep many a journalist in business full time

It's rather like the deal Philips did some years ago when sold its audio products operations, known as Wox Innovations, again to Gibson Brands – which at the time of writing looked likely to cut a deal to sell Wox Innovations to TCL – and outsourced its TV manufacturing to Japanese company Funai. It did all that in order to concentrate on its core businesses, principally medical electronics and lighting.

Such brand-licensing deals are common: buy a Sanyo TV and it's also made by Funai, under licence from Panasonic; buy a Sharp or Toshiba and it's made by Chinese company Hisense, and so on. Things aren't always what they seem and sometimes it's hard to work out who owns what.

However, what goes around often comes around. Thorens, the famous

turntable company founded in Switzerland some 135 years ago as a maker of clock movements and musical boxes, and with a 115-year record-player heritage, is moving back to Germany under new ownership. Back to Germany? Well, in its history the company has been German, moving to Lahr in the Black Forest in the 1960s, and then Swiss again when Heinz Röhrer became CEO. Now new owner Gunter Kürten has brought it back to Bergisch Gladbach in the Cologne/Bonn region, which he says is becoming Germany's ‘Analogue Valley’.

Sometimes, though, things have to disappear, and that's certainly the fate that appears to have befallen Oppo Digital, the company set up in Silicon Valley 14 years ago to develop first DVD and then Blu-ray players. As noted on page 117, it has decided to make a gradual exit from the market by ceasing development of new products, with commentators suggesting the move has been spurred by the rise in streaming video media and a decline in disc sales.

The same streaming effect is thought to be behind the termination of Technics Tracks, launched by Panasonic when it revived its specialist audio brand a few years back. Built on the 7 Digital platform but with its own look and feel, it was designed to allow buyers to browse ‘hundreds of thousands of 24-bit/192kHz tracks and millions of 16-bit/44.1kHz songs with no compromises, and all the convenience of digital downloads’. If you'll excuse the (almost) pun, Technics Tracks never seemed to gain the kind of traction of, say, the Onkyo Music store, which launched in Japan as e-Onkyo some 13 years ago and is still going strong, having had a major ‘look and feel’ revamp last year, again on the 7 Digital platform. So the announcement that Technics was retreating back into its core hardware business, while unexpected, was not a huge surprise.

These changes and moves will keep on happening as the audio industry reinvents itself. I'm writing this just a week before the annual High End show in Munich and I'm looking forward to the first conversation beginning ‘You'll never guess what ...’



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NOTES & LETTERS

Honouring a composer's intentions in opera • Salonen vs Sibelius? • Making a racket in Nielsen

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Skirting around Sibelius?

I note, reading the article on Esa-Pekka Salonen (June issue), that there is no mention of his country's greatest composer Sibelius. I find this strange, although Salonen has done his best to distance himself from his fellow Finn's music all his life. And with good reason – because, in my view, his performances are not that good, with the exception of a truly inspired *Lemminkäinen Suite*. Salonen is a modernist who fails to appreciate Sibelius's own progressive thought as if his shadow must be avoided at all cost to allow his own time in the sun.

Edward Clark

President, United Kingdom Sibelius Society

False memories

I once wrote *Gramophone* a letter in which I stated that the Pierre Monteux recording with the San Francisco Symphony Orchestra of Brahms's Second Symphony on four RCA Victor shellac 78 rpm discs sounded much more alive than his later recordings with the London Symphony Orchestra and Vienna Philharmonic. At the time I had not listened to the CD transfer of the oldest recording and was relying on my memory. But later, when I bought the CD transfer which was part of the Monteux edition on RCA, I was disillusioned, as that CD transfer sounded just as sluggish in the first movement as in the other recordings of that symphony by Monteux and by most other conductors as well. The recordings by Toscanini with the NBC Symphony Orchestra and Klemperer with the Philharmonia liven up the first movement and I prefer them.

Do many other listeners experience false memories of older recordings?

Dr Frank Boardman
Athens

Drowning out the orchestra

A very belated comment to the laudatory review (Replay, July 2016) of Barbirolli's live performance of Nielsen's Symphony No 5 in October 1960 from Manchester's Free Trade Hall. Rob Cowan singles out the first movement's side-drummer as 'becoming a veritable Gene Krupa and making a fair old racket', but this is what Nielsen specifically requires when he instructs the player to improvise 'as if

Letter of the Month

Authentic opera please

I cannot claim that I have seen the vast swathe of productions referred to by your recent correspondents, but I was fortunate to see Klemperer's *Fidelio* and the Sutherland/Pavarotti *La fille du régiment* – both were wonderful productions and true to the composer. I was also able to see the production of *Idomeneo* at Glyndebourne conducted by Simon Rattle. The singing and orchestral playing was great, but a chorus in American Army fatigues singing to the god Neptune, the old King, wonderfully sung by Langridge but wearing a 1960s Saville Row suit and being pushed around in a wheelchair – all this was nothing but a distraction. And then there was Glyndebourne's *Der Rosenkavalier* with lush Romantic music purporting to



Pavarotti and Sutherland in *La fille du régiment*

match a 1920s-period production: how can you match the wonderful Richard Strauss waltzes with the 1920s Jazz Age?

Gerald Funnell
Hastings, East Sussex

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at all costs he wants to stop the progress of the orchestra'. And this is what the otherwise fine performances of the work by, for example, Bernstein, Blomstedt and Colin Davis specifically lack, for we never believe that their side-drummers have the slightest chance of stopping the orchestra, whereas with Barbirolli's drummer, we do.

I was at another Barbirolli performance of the same work at about this time, and I was surprised to see that the drummer was the Hallé's principal timpanist Jack Gledhill who had clearly pulled rank over the orchestra's percussion section for what must be the most prestigious drum part in all of the symphonic repertoire. Gledhill had composed his terrifying cadenzas in score and so, oblivious of Barbirolli and everyone else, had to be cued in and out by a colleague. I have only seen a soloist being cued in by another player on one other occasion and this was when Hugo d'Alton played the mandolin in the first performances of Boulez's *Pli selon pli* in the late 1960s, almost certainly due to a lack of experience of playing in a symphony orchestra. I wonder

if any *Gramophone* readers have seen a player being helped in this way in any other works?

Tudor Wright
London

Editorial notes

In his review of *Le Secchia Rapita*, Tim Ashley writes that the author of the poem of the same name, published in 1622, is Alessandro Tomassi; he is, of course, the poet Alessandro Tassoni, born in Modena in 1565 and who died there in 1635.

In his review of the world-premiere recording of Stanford's early Violin Concerto on Dutton (July, page 51), Andrew Mellor referred to the recording by Anthony Marwood on Hyperion. This is of a different concerto, in the same key but composed much later.

Regarding the Emerson Quartet's Complete Recordings on DG (mentioned in Rob Cowan's Box-set Round-up, May), we are told by Universal that a re-press is going ahead in the coming weeks and that it should be available again from September this year.

OBITUARIES

A prolific and versatile conductor; a prize-winning soprano

GENNADY ROZHDESTVENSKY

Conductor

Born May 4, 1931

Died June 16, 2018



The former Principal Conductor of the BBC Symphony Orchestra, Vienna SO, USSR Ministry of Culture SO and Royal Stockholm PO

has died at the age of

87. The Moscow-born Rozhdestvensky came from a musical family – his father Nikolai Anosov was a conductor and teacher, his mother Natalya Rozhdestvenskaya a soprano (Rozhdestvensky adopted his mother's name because, as a conductor, he didn't want the family connection to be seen as having helped his career). He studied at the Moscow Conservatory before making his name, at 20, conducting at the Bolshoi Theatre, a house with which he maintained a long association (he was Principal Conductor from 1964 to 1970, and in 2000 he would be appointed General Artistic Director).

A champion of music by living composers, Rozhdestvensky conducted numerous premieres including the first Russian performances of Britten's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (1965), and the first performances outside of Russia of Shostakovich's Fourth and Twelfth Symphonies (in Edinburgh in 1962). He was a loyal champion of the music of Alfred Schnittke and Sofia Gubaidulina, and often performed the music of Edison Denisov, Giya Kancheli and Rodion Shchedrin. He also gave the first cycle of Vaughan Williams's symphonies in Russia.

As a conductor he had a fine stick technique and a way of inspiring his musicians to play better than they thought they could – he did not believe in over-rehearsing, preferring the inspiration of the moment to bring off some very impressive music-making. 'The point of rehearsal is to put together the concert,' he told the film-maker Bruno Monsaingeon, 'not to give the concert. The concert brings with it an emotional intensity that couldn't, and shouldn't, be there beforehand, and I like to keep back a bit of improvisation on the night.'

In his Icons article on the conductor (April 2016) Peter Quantrill wrote that

'the symphonies of Prokofiev, Roussel, Sibelius, Schnittke and Vaughan Williams are essential listening not for interpretative revelation or novelty but to marvel at a subversively balletic approach to symphonic structures where the narrative line is paramount. Shostakovich finds [Rozhdestvensky] in his element, especially the circus and cemetery of the Fourth Symphony, which has been an unlikely business card down the years.'

Rozhdestvensky was married to the pianist Viktoria Postnikova with whom he recorded the Tchaikovsky piano concertos in Vienna for Decca. His extensive discography – he recorded nearly 800 individual works – embraces numerous labels, a significant number being made for Chandos. Many of his BBC performances are also available on the ICA Classics Legacy label.

KRISTINE CIESINSKI

Soprano

Born July 5, 1952

Died June 9, 2018



A keen pilot, Kristine Ciesinski was killed in a glider accident in the Grand Teton National Park in Utah where she lived with her husband, the British

bass-baritone Norman Bailey. She was 65.

Ciesinski began her vocal studies at Boston University, going on to study with a number of teachers including Gerald Moore (1990-96) and, at the Guildhall School of Music, Iain Burnside.

Her sister, Katherine, was also a fine singer and they both, in consecutive years (1977 and 1978), won the Geneva International Music Competition. In the same year (1977), Kristine also won first prize in the International Opera Competition in Salzburg. Her most performed roles were Katerina in Shostakovich's *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk* and the title-role in Richard Strauss's *Salome*, a part she sang in 18 different productions. Ciesinski released few recordings but she made a strong impression as Anna Maurant in Scottish Opera's production of Kurt Weill's *Street Scene*, subsequently recorded by TER. She can also be seen on DVD in the 1996 Frankfurt Opera production of Berg's *Wozzeck* conducted by Cambreling.

NEXT MONTH SEPTEMBER 2017



Viktoria Mullova records Arvo Pärt

The violinist returns to Tallinn, Estonia, for the first time since defecting from the Soviet Union, to record Pärt, overseen by the composer himself.

Andrew Mellor reports on an intense meeting of musical minds

Van Zweden: maestro on a mission

Neil Fisher meets the conductor as he continues his recorded *Ring* cycle with the HK Philharmonic to discuss his impending role as the NY Phil's new Music Director

Debussy's La mer

Rob Cowan surveys the available recordings of this Impressionistic seascape and chooses his favourite

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Aho Pf Conc No 1. Timp Conc. *Fräki/Mäenpää/Turku PO/Ollikainen/Lasonpalo*.

⑆ 📀 **BIS2306**

Bach, CPE Solo Kybd Wks, Vol 36. *Spányi*.

⑆ **BIS2263**

Martinsson Presentiment – Orch Wks. *Larsson/Royal Stockholm PO/Oramo/Manze*.

⑆ 📀 **BIS2133**

Spohr Sons for Hp & Vn. *Nagasawa/Bernardini*.

⑆ 📀 **BIS2302**

Stravinsky Wks for Vn, Vol 2. *Gringolts/Laul/Galicia SO/Slobodeniouk*.

⑆ 📀 **BIS2275**

BRILLIANT CLASSICS

brilliantclassics.com

Devienne Trios for Fl, Va & Vc. *Ligas/Rea/Atzeni*.

④ **95686**

Doles Kybd Sons. *Kim*.

④ **95454**

Dussek Cpte Pf Sons, Vol 3. *Lubimov*.

④ **95607**

d'India Musiche a una e due voci. *Ens Arte Musica/Cera*.

④ **95634**

Various Cpsrs Ninna Nanna – Lullabies. *Calandra/Bono/Lippi/Alfieri/Andreis*.

④ **95771**

Various Cpsrs Spanish Portrait – Gtr Wks. *Attademo*.

④ **95702**

Various Cpsrs Wks for Bn & Pf. *Martín/Ara*.

④ **95761**

BR-KLASSIK

br-online.de

Various Cpsrs Op Arias. *Gruberová*.

⑆ **900325**

CALLIOPE

indesens.fr

Messiaen Vingt regards sur l'Enfant-Jésus. *Ayroles*.

⑆ ② **CAL1633**

CAMEO

wyastone.co.uk

Brüll Orch Wks. *Various artists*.

⑥ ② ③ **CC9103**

CAPELLA DE MINISTERS

capelladeministrers.es

Various Cpsrs Arels: Entre la tradició i el patrimoni. *Capella de Ministers/Magraner*.

⑆ **CDM1844**

CHANDOS

chandos.net

Beethoven Pf Trios, Op 1. *Trio Goya*.

⑆ **CHAN0822**

Bennett Orch Wks, Vol 2. *BBC Scottish SO/Wilson*.

⑆ 📀 **CHSA5212**

Haydn Pf Sons, Vol 7. *Bavouzet*.

⑆ **CHAN10998**

Various Cpsrs Come to Me in My Dreams. *Connolly/Middleton*.

⑆ **CHAN10944**

CLAUDIO

claudiorecords.com

Schubert Pf Wks, Vol 1 (r2003). *Roberts*.

⑆ **CR5362-2**

CLAVES

claves.ch

Capron Vn Sons, Book 1. *Roux/Lee/Desmeules*.

⑆ **50-1809**

Cerha Chbr Wks. *Swiss Chbr Sols*.

⑆ **50-1816**

CPO

jpc.de/jpcng/cpo/home

Benda Va Concs Nos 1-3. *Soucy/SWR SO, Baden-Baden & Freiburg/Labadie*.

⑆ **CP0555 167-2**

Gernsheim Wks for Vc & Pf. *Hülshoff/Triendl*.

⑆ **CP0555 054-2**

Goldschmidt. Reizenstein Vc Concs. *Wallfisch/Berlin*

Konzerthaus Orch/Milton.

⑆ **CP0555 109-2**

Haydn. Mozart. Romberg Alla turca. *Schröder/Collegium*

Musicum Basel/Griffiths, K.

⑆ **CP0555 175-2**

Mozart Oca del Cairo. Sposo deluso. *Antwerp Chbr Op/Rotman*.

④ ③ **CP0999 104-2**

Khachaturian Pf Concs. *Simonian/Staatsorhch Rheinische Philh/Raiskin*.

⑆ **CP0777 918-2**

Kozeluch Three Scottish Pf Trios. *Trio 1790*.

⑆ **CP0555 035-2**

CYBELE

cybele.de

Berlioz Sym fantastique *Wagner* Tannhäuser – Ov & Venusberg Music. *Wuppertal SO/Jones, J*.

⑆ 📀 **HCKLASSIK3D801801**

DELOS

delosmusic.com

Alén Cuban Memoirs – Pf Wks. *Villaverde*.

⑆ **DE3535**

Frolov Wks for Vn & Pf. *Koornhof/Schalkwky*.

⑆ **DE3557**

Various Cpsrs Transcendent. *Asia/America New Music Inst*.

⑆ **DE3555**

DELPHIAN

delphianrecords.co.uk

Anderson, J Chor Wks. *Ch of Gonville & Caius Coll/Webber*.

⑆ **DCD34202**

Various Cpsrs In Sorrow's Footsteps. *Marian Consort/McCleery*.

⑆ **DCD34215**

DIVINE ART

divine-art.co.uk

Ferrari, C Women of History – Org Wks. *Cooman*.

⑆ **DDA25178**

DUX

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Godowski Pf Wks & Transcrs. *Kwiatkowski*.

⑆ **DUX1464**

Ives Concord Son. *Brylewski*.

⑆ **DUX1313**

Nowowiejski Sym Wks. *Opole Philh SO/Neumann, P*.

⑆ **DUX1425**

Sikorski Twilight. *Eszményi/Warsaw PO/Nagy*.

⑆ **DUX1466**

Various Cpsrs Viol Sons. *Firlus, K & A*.

⑆ **DUX1471**

Various Cpsrs Wks of the Warsaw Castle. *Oh! (Orkiestra*

Historyczna).

⑆ **DUX1382**

DYNAMIC

Puccini Fanciulla del West (pp2017). *Sols incl Magee/San Carlo Th, Naples/Valcuha*.

⑆ ② **CDS7816**

Smetana Stg Qts. *Energie Nove Qt*.

⑆ **CDS7817**

Various Cpsrs 18th-Century Neapolitan FI Sons. *Cataldi/*

Partenope Stravagante.

⑆ **CDS7819**

FONDAMENTA

fondamenta.fr

Various Cpsrs Lost Sessions from the Netherlands (pp1998).

Dearie/Metropole Orkest.

⑆ **FON1804033**

GENUIN

genuinde

Various Cpsrs Diversity. *European Brass Ens/Clamor*.

⑆ **GEN18608**

Various Cpsrs Italian Recital – Gtr Wks. *Marx*.

⑆ **GEN18614**

Various Cpsrs Reflections – Pf Wks. *Jl*.

⑆ **GEN18609**

GRAMOLA

gramola.at

Bartók Vn Concs. *Schmid/Pannon PO, Pécs/Bogányi*.

⑆ **99138**

Beethoven Folk Song Arrs. *Anderson, L/MacDougall/*

TrioVanBeethoven.

⑆ **99174**

Liszt Cpte Orch Wks. *Vienna Academy Orch/Haselböck*.

⑥ ③ ③ **99150**

Schumann Fantasy Pieces. Novellettes. *Ivanov*.

⑆ **99177**

Various Cpsrs Dbl Concs. *EntArteOpera Fest*.

④ ② 📀 **99098**

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griffinrecords.co.uk

Various Cpsrs Songs of the Sea & Folk (r1961-70). *Luxon/*

Willison.

⑆ **GCCD4084**

GUILD

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Gigout. Guilman. Vienne Org Wks. *Patrick*.

⑆ **GMCD7802**

Various Cpsrs 20th-Century Org Masterwks. *Quinn*.

⑆ **GMCD7807**

Various Cpsrs Wks for Two Pfs (r1948-56). *Smith/Sellick*.

④ ④ **GHCD3501**

HYPERION

hyperion-records.co.uk

Beethoven. Glinka. Strauss, R Princess & the Bear – Wks with Cl & Bn. *Watts/Perkins/RSNO/Edwards*.

⑆ **CDA68263**

MacMillan Stg Qts. *Royal Qt*.

⑆ **CDA68196**

Rachmaninov Études-tableaux. *Osborne*.

⑆ **CDA68188**

Various Cpsrs Lily & the Rose. *Binchois Consort/Kirkman*.

⑆ **CDA68228**

INDÉSENS

indesens.fr

Dutilleux Pages de jeunesse. *Godart/Breszynski/Gattet/Lucas/Trenel*.

⑆ **INDE087**

Various Cpsrs Art of the Cl. *Berrod/Désert/Dessenne/Godart/Strosser*.

⑆ **INDE030**

KAIROS

kairos-music.com

Coluccino Emblema. *Ex Novo Ens*.

⑆ **0015049KAI**

Qin Orch Wks. *ORF Vienna RSO/Rabl*.

⑆ **0015032KAI**

KLANGLOGO

klanglogo.de

Shostakovich Pf Conc No 1. Orch Wks. *Baryshevskyi/Leleu/*

Brandenburg St Orch/Griffiths, H.

⑆ **KL1526**

LYRITA

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Musgrave Mary Queen of Scots (pp1978). *Sols incl Putnam & Gardner/Virginia Op/Mark*.

④ ② **SRCD2369**

MEGADISC

megadisc-classics.com

Guerinel Cpte Pf Wks. *Roblin*.

④ ② **MDC7874**

Zanési Paysage électronique avec train. *Zanési*.

⑆ **MDC7795**

MELODIYA

melodysu

Rachmaninov Pf Wks. *Various artists*.

⑆ ③ **MELCD100 2542**

Various Cpsrs 20th-Century Pf Wks. *Andrushchenko*.

⑆ **MELCD100 2528**

MÉTIER

divine-art.co.uk

Craven Entangled States. *Dullea*.

⑆ **MSV28571**

McLeod Pf Wks. *McLachlan, M & R*.

④ ② **MSV77207**

Various Cpsrs New Wks for a New Ob, Vol 2. *Redgate/*

Robbings/Coull Qt.

⑆ **MSV28531**

MSR CLASSICS

msrcd.com

Reale 'Dies irae' Conc. Pf Sons Nos 7 & 8. *Mirecourt Trio/*

California St U Wind Ens/Whitwell.

⑆ **MS1693**

Various Cpsrs American Premieres. *Cosmos Trio*.

⑆ **MS1677**

Various Cpsrs Scenes from Home – Wks for Cl & Pf. *Toohey/*

Kim, S.

⑆ **MS1656**

Various Cpsrs Wks for Ob/Cor anglais & Pf. *Lumina Duo*.

⑆ **MS1643**

MUSIC & ARTS

musicandarts.com

Busoni Elegies. An die Jugend. *Grante*.

⑆ **CD1290**

NAXOS

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Balada Caprichos. *Ens Col Legno/Ferrer*.

④ **8**

Various Cpsrs And So It Goes: Songs of Folk & Lore. *Elora Sgrs/Edison.* (M) 8 573861

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Various Cpsrs Pf Wks. *Panfilov.* (M) 8 573846

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Various Cpsrs Solo Pf Recs, Vol 5 (r1919-23). *Rachmaninov.* (M) 8 111408

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Various Cpsrs Weimar & Back. *Hughes.* (F) NI6367

NORTHERN FLOWERS *nflowers.ru*

Various Cpsrs Marches of the Russian Empire. *Admiralty Band/Lyashchenko.* (F) NFMA99125

ODYSSEY OPERA *odysseyopera.org*

Argento Boor. Miss Havisham's Wedding Night. Water Bird Talk. *Sols/Odyssey Op Orch/Rose.* (F) 2 OO1002

Mascagni Zanetto. *Sol incl Calenos & Gigliotti/Odyssey Op Chor & Orch/Rose.* (F) OO1001

OEHMS *oehmsclassics.de*

Liszt Faust Sym (transcr for Org). *Albrecht, H.* (F) OC1873

Reimann Invisible (pp2017). *Sols incl Harnisch/Deutsche Op, Berlin/Runnicles.* (F) 2 OC973

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Wagner Fliegende Holländer. *Sols incl Youn & Bruns/Bayreuth Fest Op/Thelemann.* (M) 2 OACD9043D

Wagner Tannhäuser. *Sols incl Kerl, Nyland & Youn/Bayreuth Fest Op/Baumgarten.* (B) 3 OACD9044D

ORFEO *orfeo-international.de*

Wagner Tristan und Isolde (pp1958). *Sols incl Windgassen & Nilsson/Bayreuth Fest Op/Sawallisch.* (M) 3 C951 183D

PARACLETE *paracletpress.com*

Adler, S Chor Wks. *Gloriae Dei Cantores.* (F) GD0CD129

PARNASSUS *parnassusrecords.com*

Various Cpsrs Discoveries, Vol 1 (r1981-92). *Richter.* (M) PACD96063

PAVLÍK *pavlikrecords.sk*

Shostakovich Vn Son. Va Son. *Pala/Fanzowitz.* (F) PAO164-2-132

PENTATONE *pentatonemusic.com*

Shostakovich Sym Nos 4 & 10. *Russian Nat Orch/Pletnev.* (F) 2 PTC5186 647

Strauss, R Alpensinf. *Frankfurt RSO/Orozco-Estrada.* (F) PTC5186 628

PHILHARMONIA BAROQUE *philharmonia.org*

Rameau Temple de la gloire. *Sols/Philh Baroque Orch/McGegan.* (F) 2 PBP10

QUARTZ *quartzmusic.com*

Bach, JS Goldberg Vars *Takemitsu* Rain Tree Sketch II. *Fujisawa.* (F) QTZ2130

Freckleton Landscape & Longing – Pf Wks. *Ward.* (F) QTZ2126

REFERENCE RECORDINGS *referencerecordings.com*

Williams, J At the Movies. *Dallas Winds/Junkin.* (F) RR142SACD

REGENT *regent-records.co.uk*

Various Cpsrs Even Such is Time. *Ch of Christ's Coll, Cambridge/Rowland.* (F) REGCD511

RESONUS *resonusclassics.com*

Mendelssohn. Weinberg Stg Qts. *Dudok Qt, Amsterdam.* (F) RES10215

Mozart Fl Qts. *Junnonen/Chbr Domaine.* (F) RES10216

Rameau Cpte Solo Kybd Wks. *Devine.* (S) 3 RES10214

Reuchsel Vie du Christ. Banquet de France – Org Wks. *Niemirski.* (F) RES10217

Various Cpsrs Venice 1629. *Gonzaga Band.* (F) RES10218

RONDEAU PRODUCTION *rondeau.de*

Pacitti/Meissner We are Beggars. *Chs of the Reformation Jubilee/Brandenburg St Orch/Pacitti.* (M) 2 ROP615051

Various Cpsrs Gott ist unsre Zuversicht – Motets. *Halle Stadtsingechor/Flämig.* (F) ROP6158

ROYAL PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA *rpo.co.uk*

Various Cpsrs Angel of Fire – Op Arias. *Mina/RPO/Nowak.* (M) RPOSP057

RTÉ LYRIC FM *rte.ie/lyricfm/*

Various Cpsrs Piper & the Fairy Queen. *Camerata Kilkenny.* (F) RTECD156

SFS MEDIA *shopsfsymphony.org*

Tchaikovsky Sym No 6 (pp2017). *San Francisco SO/Tilson Thomas.* (F) SFS0072

SHEVA COLLECTION *shevacollection.it*

Holloway Trios. *Rest Ens.* (F) SH208

SIGNUM *signumrecords.com*

Bach, JS Cpte Org Wks, Vol 9. *Goode.* (F) SIGCD809

Telemann Solo Viol Fantasias. *Boothby.* (F) SIGCD544

Various Cpsrs Tanguero – Gtr Wks from S America. *Denoth.* (F) SIGCD358

SOLO MUSICA

Beethoven/Vracheva Pf Fantasies Inspired by Beethoven's Sym. *Vracheva.* (M) 2 SM280

Eisler. Barbara Songs. *Kost/Fueter.* (B) 2 SM289

Gnattali. Schubert. Vivaldi Sons for Vc & Gtr. *Gehweiler/Cvirm.* (F) SM285

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SOMM *somm-recordings.com*

Bantock Rediscovered – Pf Wks. *Marchant.* (F) SOMMCD0183

Bennett Glory & the Dream – Chor Wks. *Royal Birmingham Cons Chbr Ch/Spicer.* (F) SOMMCD0184

Grieg Songs. *Farley/LPO/Philh Orch/Serebrier.* (F) ARIADNE5001

SONO LUMINUS *sonoluminus.com*

Various Cpsrs Early Departures – Pf Wks. *Varga.* (F) DSL92223

STERLING *sterlingcd.com*

Various Cpsrs Maria! Maria! 400 Years of Chant in the Birgittine Order. *Ens Gemma/Lagergren.* (F) CDA1828

STONE RECORDS *stonerecords.co.uk*

Various Cpsrs Refugium. *Trinity Boys Ch/Swinson.* (F) 5060192 780819

SUPRAPHON *supraphon.com*

Various Cpsrs Prague Classics. *Various artists.* (F) SU4294-2

SWR CLASSIC *swrmusic.com*

Bloch Wks for Pf & Orch. *Lin/SWR Rad Orch, Kaiserslautern/Stärek.* (F) SWR19420CD

Tansman Wks for Two Pfs. *Duo d'Accord.* (F) SWR19053CD

Tchaikovsky Sym Nos 4 & 5 (bp1954/57). *SWF Orch, Baden-Baden/Rosbaud.* (F) SWR19062CD

TACTUS *tactus.it*

Albano. Caramiello. *Graziani* Neapolitan Songs & Famous Melodies (transcr for Hp). *Belmondo.* (F) TC830001

Cavallone Hóros. *Various artists.* (F) TC970304

Hasse Op Arias. *De Simone/Mosaico Ens.* (F) TC690801

Margola Cpte Pf Wks. *Deljavan.* (B) 3 TC901380

Monteverdi Scherzi musicali (1607). *Esa Ens/Chierici.* (F) TC561309

Yon Cpte Org Wks. *Teglia.* (F) TC882370

TOCCATA CLASSICS *toccataclassics.com*

Boëly Pf Wks, Vol 1. *McCallum.* (F) TOCC0471

Brough Picture-Preludes for Pf. *Brough.* (F) TOCC0490

Eller Cpte Pf Wks, Vol 6. *Lassmann.* (F) TOCC0475

Johnson, DH Orch, Wks, Vol 2. *RSNO/Mann.* (F) TOCC0452

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Veit Cpte Stg Qts, Vol 2. *Kertész Qt.* (F) TOCC0409

Vianna da Motta Pf Wks. *Pipa.* (F) TOCC0481

Wordsworth Orch Wks, Vol 1. *Liepāja SO/Gibbons.* (F) TOCC0480

TUDOR *tudor.ch*

Cambini. Cimarosa. *Fiorillo* Sinf concs for Two Fls & Orch. *Utagawa/Hunziker/Paul Kuentz CO/Kuentz.* (F) TUDOR7505

Various Cpsrs Carnevale di Venezia. *Brunner/Munich CO/Stadlmair.* (F) TUDOR7506

VANGUARD CLASSICS

Beethoven Pf Sons Nos 14, 26 & 32. *Novaes.* (S) OVC8072

Shostakovich Stg Qt No 2. Pf Qnt. *Shostakovich/Beethoven Qt.* (S) OVC8077

Vaughan Williams Sym No 6. *Dona nobis pacem. Sols/Utah SO/Abravanel.* (S) OVC7

Various Cpsrs Russian, Israeli & Jewish Folk Songs (r1995). *Davrath.* (S) 2 OVC8058/9

VARÈSE SARABANDE *varesesarabande.com*

Beale Shock & Awe. *OST.* (F) 302 067 585-8

Beltrami Hellboy. *OST.* (F) 302 066 562-5

Doyle Sgt Stubby. *OST.* (F) 302 067 580-8

Eisler, F Life of the Party. *OST.* (F) 302 067 565-8

Hamlisch Play It Again, Marvin!. *Kalamazoo SO/Green.* (F) 302 067 582-8

Massari Killer Klowns from Outer Space – Reimagined. *Orch.* (F) 302 067 345-8

VOX CLASSICS *voxclassics.com*

Bach, JS. Telemann Stes for Fl & Hpd (pp1981). *Baker/Newman/Madeira Fest Orch.* (F) MCD10008

Beethoven Pf Sons Nos 3 & 23 (r1983). *Schub.* (F) MCD10009

Farberman Arrs for Perc. *All Star Perc Ens.* (F) MCD10007

Mendelssohn Sym Nos 4 & 5. *Baltimore SO/Commissiona.* (F) MCD10044

Rachmaninov Bells. Isle of the Dead (r1983). *St Louis SO/Slatkin.* (F) MCD10020

Sousa Peaches & Cream (r1982). *Cincinnati Pops Orch/Kunzel.* (F) MCD10005

Various Cpsrs Art of the Tpt (pp1981). *Carroll/New York Tpt Ens.* (F) MCD10001

Various Cpsrs Virtuoso Vn. *Oliveira/McDonald.* (F) MCD10027

WARNER CLASSICS *warnerclassics.com*

Bernstein Three Sym. Prelude, Fugue & Riffs. *S Cecilia Orch, Rome/Pappano.* (F) 2 9029 56615-8

WERGO *wergo.de*

Mundry. Walgter, CJ Fächer. *Rothbrust/Ens Musikfabrik/Rundel, P/Pomàrico.* (F) WER6867-2

Paraskevaldis Libres en el sonido. *Ens Aventure.* (F) WER7362-2

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WILLOWHAYNE *willowhaynerecords.com*

Adès. Bach, JS. Chopin Pf Wks. *Fripp, A.* (F) WHR053

DVD & BLU-RAY

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Lehár Land des Lächelns (pp2017). *Sols incl Beczala & Kleiter/Philh Zurich/Luisi.* (F) DVD ACC20435; (F) ACC10435

CMajor ENTERTAINMENT

Various Cpsrs Brezeng Fest: Op on the Lake Stage. *Various artists.* (M) 6 DVD 745808; (M) 5 DVD 745904

Various Cpsrs Salzburg Fest Concerts. *Various artists.* (M) 6 DVD 746008; (M) 6 DVD 746104

DUX *dux.pl*

Weinberg Passenger (pp2016). *Sols/Ekaterinberg Op/von Dohnányi, O.* (F) DVD DVDDUX8387

DYNAMIC

Puccini Fanciulla del West (pp2017). *Sols incl Magee/San Carlo Th, Naples/Valčuha.* (F) DVD 37816; (F) DVD 57816

NAXOS *naxos.com*

Rossini Comte Ory. *Sols/Malmö Op Orch/Ringborg.* (F) DVD 2 110388; (F) NBD0062V

OPUS ARTE

Dean Hamlet (pp2017). *Sols incl Clayton, Connolly & Hannigan/LPO/Jurowski.* (F) DVD OA1254D; (F) OABD7231D














































Verdi Trovatore (pp2017). *Sols incl Tsymbalyuk & Haroutounian/Royal Op/Farnes.* (F) DVD OA1262D; (F) OABD7238D

PARNASSUS *parnassusrecords.com*

Various Cpsrs Russian Masterpieces (r1981-84). *Leningrad PO/Mravinsky.* (F) DVD PDVD1206

VAI

Various Cpsrs Great Moments in Russian Op. *Various artists.* (F) DVD DVDVAI4602

Liszt	Madrigals – Book 5; Book 6	77	Poulenc	Suleika I, D720	79	V	Vaughan Williams		
Années de pèlerinage – première année: Suisse, S160	Ohimè ch'io cado	76	La voix humaine  	Suleika II, D717	79		Flos campi		47
La campanella, S141 No 3	Orfeo – Dal mio Permesso amato	76	Prokofiev	Symphony No 3, D200	48		Oboe Concerto		47
Fantasia über Themen aus Mozarts Figaro und Don Giovanni, S697 (arr Busoni)	Orfeo – Prologue	 95	Five Melodies, Op 35 <i>bis</i>	Vier Gesänge aus 'Wilhelm Meister', D877 – No 2, Heiss mich nicht reden; No 3, So lasst mich scheinen; No 4, Nur wer die Sehnsucht kennt	58		Piano Concerto		47
Liebeslied ('Widmung' von Robert Schumann), S566 <i>a</i>	Orfeo – Sinfonia; Qual honor di te sia degno; Rosa del ciel; Tu se' morta; Vi ricorda o boschi' obrosi	83	Violin Sonatas – No 1, Op 80; No 2, Op 94 <i>a</i>		58		Serenade to Music		47
St François de Paule marchant sur les flots, S175 No 1	Si dolce è 'l tormento	83	Puccini	Il tabarro	92		Verdi		
	Voglio di vita uscir	76	R				Otello	 	94
Lukaszewski	Mozart		Rachmaninov	W Schuman			Villa-Lobos		
Beati	Fantasia, K396	42	Piano Concerto No 2, Op 18	Song of Orpheus	103		Bachiana Brasileira No 5		103
Cantate Domino	Flute Concertos – No 1, K313; No 2, K314	 42	Rameau	C Schumann			Vivaldi		
Daylight Declines	Lucio Silla	  92	Les Boréades – Entrée d'Abaris	Scherzo No 2, Op 14	69		Sinfonia, RV140		49
Lamentations	Piano Concertos – No 7 for Three Pianos, K242; No 10 for Two Pianos, K365; No 20, K466; No 21, K467	42	Castor et Pollux – Tristes apprêts	R Schumann			String Concertos – RV109; RV117; RV118; RV126; RV138; RV142; RV145; RV152; RV155; RV161; 'Conca', RV163; RV165; RV167		47
Responsoria Tenebrae	Piano Concerto No 9, 'Jeunehomme', K271	71	Complete Solo Keyboard Works	Adventlied, Op 71	80		Viola d'amore Concertos – RV393; RV394; RV396; RV397		47
Shakespeare Sonnets	Piano Concerto No 21, K467	103	Hippolyte et Aricie – Ritournelle	Ballade vom Pagen und der Königstochter, Op 140	80		Violin Concertos – RV120; RV158; RV248; RV260; RV270 <i>a</i>		49
Lutosławski	Sonata for Two Pianos, K448	42	Les Indes galantes – Chaconne	Cello Concerto, Op 129	103		Vivanco		
Livre pour orchestre	Mysliveček		Nais	Fantasiestücke, Op 12	69		Assumpsit Jesus Petrum		80
Lutjens	Flute Concerto	 42	Nais – Je ne sais quel ennui me presse	Symphony No 4, Op 120	48		Assumpta est Maria		80
Verses of Love	N		Platée – Orage	Toccata, Op 7	69		De profundis		80
M	Nielsen		Zoroastre – Ballet Figure and Air	Sebastiani			Magnificat primi toni		80
MacMillan	Symphonies – No 3, 'Sinfonia espansiva', Op 27; No 4, 'The Inextinguishable', Op 29	44	Ravel	St Matthew Passion	80		Missa Assumpsit Jesus O sacrum convivium		80
Miserere	O		String Quartet	Shamo			Surge, propera, amica mea		80
Mahler	Onovwerosuoke		Tzigane	Piano Sonata No 3	67		Veni, dilecte mi		80
Symphony No 2, 'Resurrection'	24 Studies in African Rhythms (excs)	69	Violin Sonata	Sibelius			Versa est in luctum		80
Symphony No 4	Onyeji		Rawsthorne	Symphony No 5, Op 82	48		W		
Martinů	Echoes of Traditional Life	69	Four Seasonal Songs	Stradella			Walton		
Cello Sonata No 2	Ekele (Greeting)	69	Rheinberger	La pace incatenata – Prologue	 95		Where does the uttered music go?		82
Concerto for Two Pianos, H292	P		Piano Concerto, Op 94	R Strauss			Warlock		
Concerto for Two Violins, H329	Paisiello		Ringger	Don Juan, Op 20	45		The Full Heart		82
Rhapsody-Concerto, H337	L'Olimpiade – Caro, son tua così	94	Nachhall	Festmarsch	45		Weinberg		
Massenet	Páleniček		Rittler	Macbeth, Op 23	45		Polish Melodies, Op 47 No 2		42
Don Quichotte; Hérodiade; Le jongleur de Notre-Dame; Manon; Sapho; Thaïs; Werther	Chorale Variations on the Theme 'O Sacred Head, Now Wounded'	56	Ciaccona a 7	Symphonie domestica, Op 53	48		Collections		
	Palestrina		Rossi	Tod und Verklärung, Op 24	45		'The Age of Revolutions' – Harmonia Mundi		99
Fanny Mendelssohn	Ave Maria	82	Il palazzo incantato – Prologue	Stravinsky			'Archetypon' – Mary-Ellen Nesi		94
Gondellied, Op 1 No 6	Beata es, virgo Maria	74	Roussel	Ballad	 58		'Celebrating 150 Years' – Zurich Tonhalle Orchestra		48
Lied, Op 2 No 1	Stabat mater	82	Évocations, Op 15	Divertimento	 58		'A Certain Slant of Light' – Songs on Poems by Emily Dickinson' – Lisa Delan		 81
Sechs Lieder, Op 9 – No 2, Ferne; No 6, Die Mainacht	Super flumina Babylonis	82	Piano Trio, Op 2	Élégie	 58		'The Complete Cetra Recordings, 1937-1942, and selected additional 78s' – Carlo Zecchi		69
Felix Mendelssohn	Parry		Pour une fête de printemps, Op 22	Pastorale	 58		'Complete Concerto and Sonata Recordings' – Leonard Rose		103
Concerto for Violin, Piano and String Orchestra	Twelve Sets of English Lyrics, Vol 2	77	Suite, Op 33	Petrushka – Danse russe	71		'Emil Gilels Edition 1933-1963'		103
A Midsummer Night's Dream – Overture, Op 21; Incidental Music, Op 61 (excs)	Penderecki		Rubinstein	Suite italienne	 58		'Ekele' – Piano Music by African Composers' – Rebecca Omordia		69
Rondo capriccioso, Op 14	Polonaise	42	Melody, Op 3 No 1 (arr Auer)	Tango (arr Dushkin)	 58		'The Family Spirit' – Harmonia Mundi		99
Scherzo a capriccio, WoO3	Pergolesi		Romance, Op 44 No 1 (arr Mikhailovsky)	Variation d'Apollon	 58		'The Gluepot Connection' – Londinium Chamber Choir		82
Songs Without Words – Op 19 No 1; Op 30 No 3; 'Frühlingslied', Op 62 No 6; Op 67 No 1; 'Spinnerlied', Op 67 No 4	Mass in D	77	Viola Sonata, Op 49 – Andante	Violin Concerto	 58		'In Between' – Sophie Pacini		69
String Quartets – No 1, Op 12; No 2, Op 13; No 6, Op 80	Dignas laudes resonemus	77	S	Suk			'In Sorrow's Footsteps' – Marian Consort		82
Variations sérieuses, Op 54	Piazzolla		Saint-Saëns	Moods, Op 10	66		'Landmarks of Recorded Pianism, Vol 1' – Various artists		71
Merlet	Allegro tangabile	 57	Cello Concerto No 1, Op 33	Piano Pieces, Op 7	66		'Light Divine' – Aksel Rykkvin		82
Passacaille et Fugue	La Camorra I	 57	Symphony No 3, 'Organ', Op 78	Spring, Op 22 <i>a</i>	66		'Piano Modern Recital, Vol 2' – Orlando Bass		67
Merula	Fuga y misterio	 57	A Scariatti	Summer Impressions, Op 22 <i>b</i>	66		'Prologue' – Francesca Aspromonte		 95
Mitropoulos	Introducción al ángel	 57	Gli equivoci in amore – Prologue	Szymanowski			'Retrospective: French Sonatas' – Ittai Shapira		54
Passacaille, Intermezzo et Fugue	Milonga del ángel	 57	 95	Prelude and Fugue	67		'Russian Romantics' – Hideko Udagawa		59
Młynarski	Muerte del ángel	 57	D Scariatti	String Quartets – No 1, Op 37; No 2, Op 56	58		'Songs of Orpheus'		83
Symphony, 'Polonia', Op 14	Poema valseado	 57	Keyboard Sonatas – Kk9; Kk14; Kk450	T			'La Venezia di Anna Maria' – Midori Seiler		49
Moeran	Resurrección del ángel	 57	Keyboard Sonatas – selection	Taneyev			'Whispering Leaves' – Lucie Štěpánová		56
Songs of Springtime	Romance del diablo	 57	Schnittke	Prelude and Fugue, Op 29	67				
Moeschinger	Tango del diablo	 57	Improvisation and Fugue	Tarp					
Symphony No 4, Op 80	Vayamos al diablo	 57	Schoeck	Concertino for Flute and Orchestra, Op 30	 47				
Monteverdi	Porpora		Penthesilea, Op 39	Concertino for Violin and Orchestra, Op 13	 47				
Cantate Domino	Andromeda liberata – Lo so barbari fati	94	Schoenberg	The Dethroned Animal Tamer, Op 38 – Suite	 47				
Et è pur dunque vero	Catone – È ver che all'amo intorno	91	Three Pieces, Op 11 – No 2, Mässig	Overture to a Comedy No 1, Op 36	 47				
L'incoronazione di Poppea – Disprezzata Regina	Deianira, Iole ed Ercole – Se morrai per me chi resta?	94	Scholz	Suite on Old Danish Folk Songs	 47				
Lamento d'Arianna	Polifemo – Sì, che son quella, sì	94	Capriccio, Op 35	Tchaikovsky					
Lamento della Ninfa	Porra		Piano Concerto, Op 57	The Nutcracker and I	66				
Lettera amorosa	Domino Suite	 44	Schubert	Piano Concerto No 1, Op 23 – excs	71				
	Entropia	 44	Arpeggione Sonata, D821	Tilson Thomas					
	Kohta	 44	Blondel zu Marien, D626	Poems of Emily Dickinson (excs)	 81				
			Ellens Gesänge, D837-839	Traditional					
			Gretchen am Spinnrade, D118	Chineke Diri Ekele (arr Onyeji)	69				
			Gretchens Bitte, D564 (compl Britten)						
			Kennst du das Land?, D321						
			Der König in Thule, D367						
			Rosamunde, D797 – No 3 <i>b</i> , Romanze						

Barney Norris

The author and playwright on his musical upbringing, and the composers who have made the biggest impact on his work

I've had a few parents, all of whom have been concert musicians. My stepdad is a baritone, my mum was a soprano with The Sixteen, and then my old man [David Owen Norris] plays the piano and has done a lot of radio over the years, though latterly has been composing. The only person I ever thought of as a stepmum was again an operatic soprano, so actually music was quite all-consuming, and from an early age I went to gigs because *they* were at gigs. From the age of six to the age of 11 I spent every Christmas Day with my family at Westminster Cathedral listening to the services. I also went to the Dartington Festival every summer almost from the year dot. I'd go to all these concerts and masterclasses and sit in the back until I couldn't bear it anymore because I was only five! But by the age of 14, it had become an amazing little secret cubby-hole thing, something that none of my peer group knew about, or were involved in, or needed to be involved in.

Growing up in Salisbury I played the trombone, but I don't know if I was very good at it – in fact I was quite bad. The main activity was my school choir, with which I rehearsed three times a week. I think our conductor Steve Abbott was a hugely important figure in the cultural life of that school, and the city too. The really interesting thing about the music department, being over the road from the main campus, was its sense of escape. Steve let us use the music library as an alternative Sixth Form common room, and if you showed an interest in something then he enabled you to follow it, in a very proactive way. So if you went through that school at the same time as I did, you'll associate music with expression, encouragement, enabling creativity, freedom, agency, authority. It meant you would chuck yourself into things in a way that you wouldn't have done otherwise.

The pieces that are most important to me – with the exception of the Fauré and Mozart Requiems – are the ones that I've found since leaving school. As an aesthetic, Schubert's *Winterreise* is the most important to what I do now. When you work in books or plays, you are surrounded by people in the entertainment industry, who ostensibly are doing the same thing that you're doing, except that you're not really working in the entertainment industry: you're working in the grief industry. I'm interested in using storytelling as a way of trying to get to the heart of human experience, and I think what's so extraordinary about *Winterreise* is that a man who was relatively conscious that his life was ending was able to record what it was like to feel in that moment, and because he was also a genius, he recorded that very evocatively and powerfully. It's someone who's right out there at the limits of human experience – and he can express it. So that's lucky, because loads of people can't!



THE RECORD I COULDN'T LIVE WITHOUT

Gavin Bryars *The Sinking of the Titanic*
Soloists; Gavin Bryars Ensemble
Philips (2/95)

This is the piece I've probably listened to the most, recently. It's amazing, and very sad.

The other person who's been really important since I left school is Benjamin Britten, again because of the aesthetic. His selection of stories and his way of seeing existing stories is thrilling, in the same way that you'd watch a truly great theatre director have a take on something. I've only seen one production of Britten's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* but my god he solves the play!

I've also been involved in a couple of gigs that have become important nights in my life. I helped on an Elgar gig my old man was doing in Northamptonshire, where he played the first piano sketches for the Cello Concerto and *The Dream of Gerontius*. Elgar is one of those composers with whom – a little bit like every Victorian novelist – you get moments where you can see right through to the heart of the guy, but so often he's buried under the cultural moment he's in. It's difficult to hear past the lush and staid way that music was popularly made at that time, but when you hear his music on the piano you hear the radicalism and musical invention of the man. **G**

Barney Norris's latest book 'The Wellspring: Conversations with David Owen Norris' is out now, published by Seren

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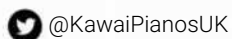
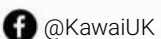
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